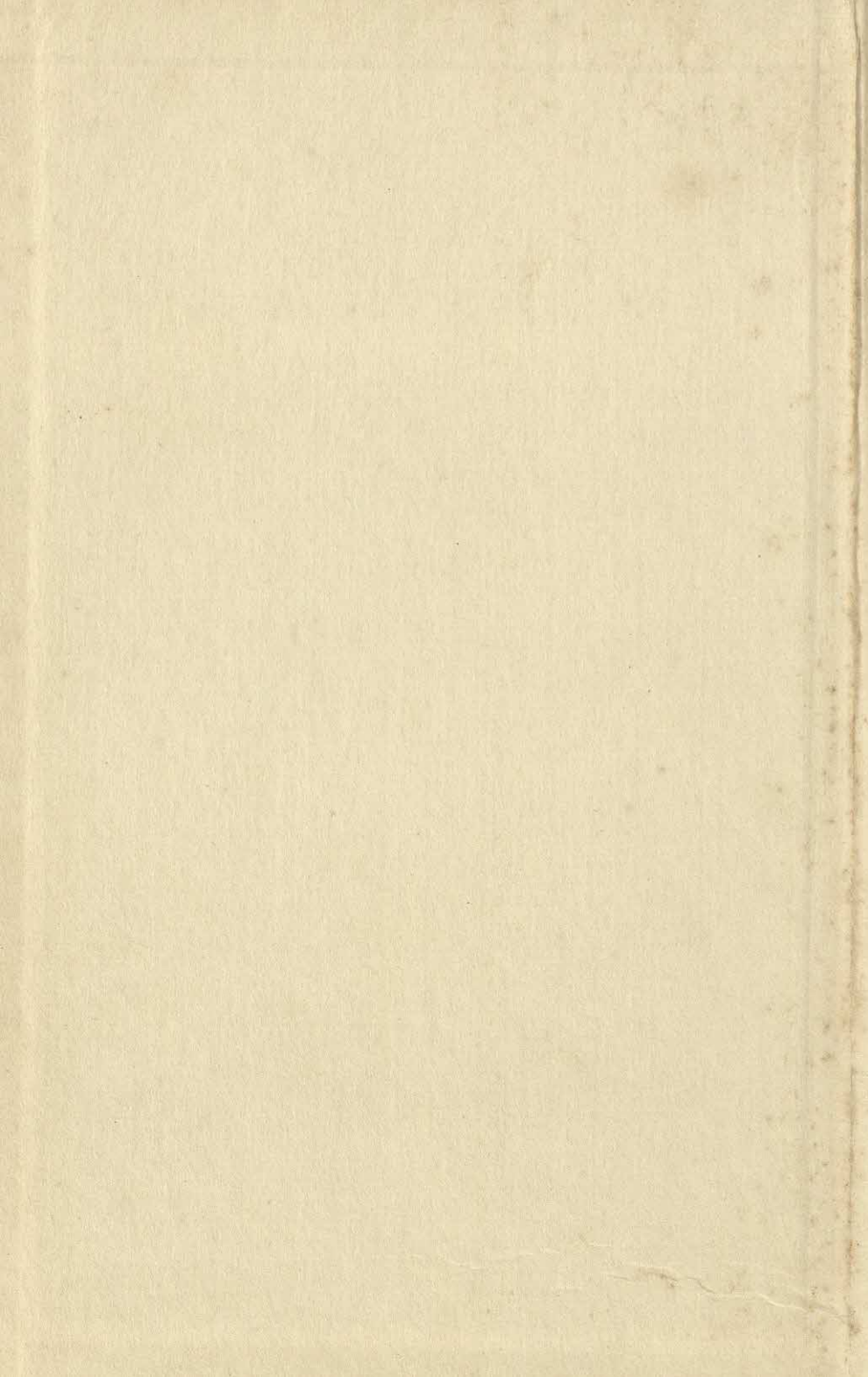


Ilya Ehren- burg

**Post-war Years
1945-54**

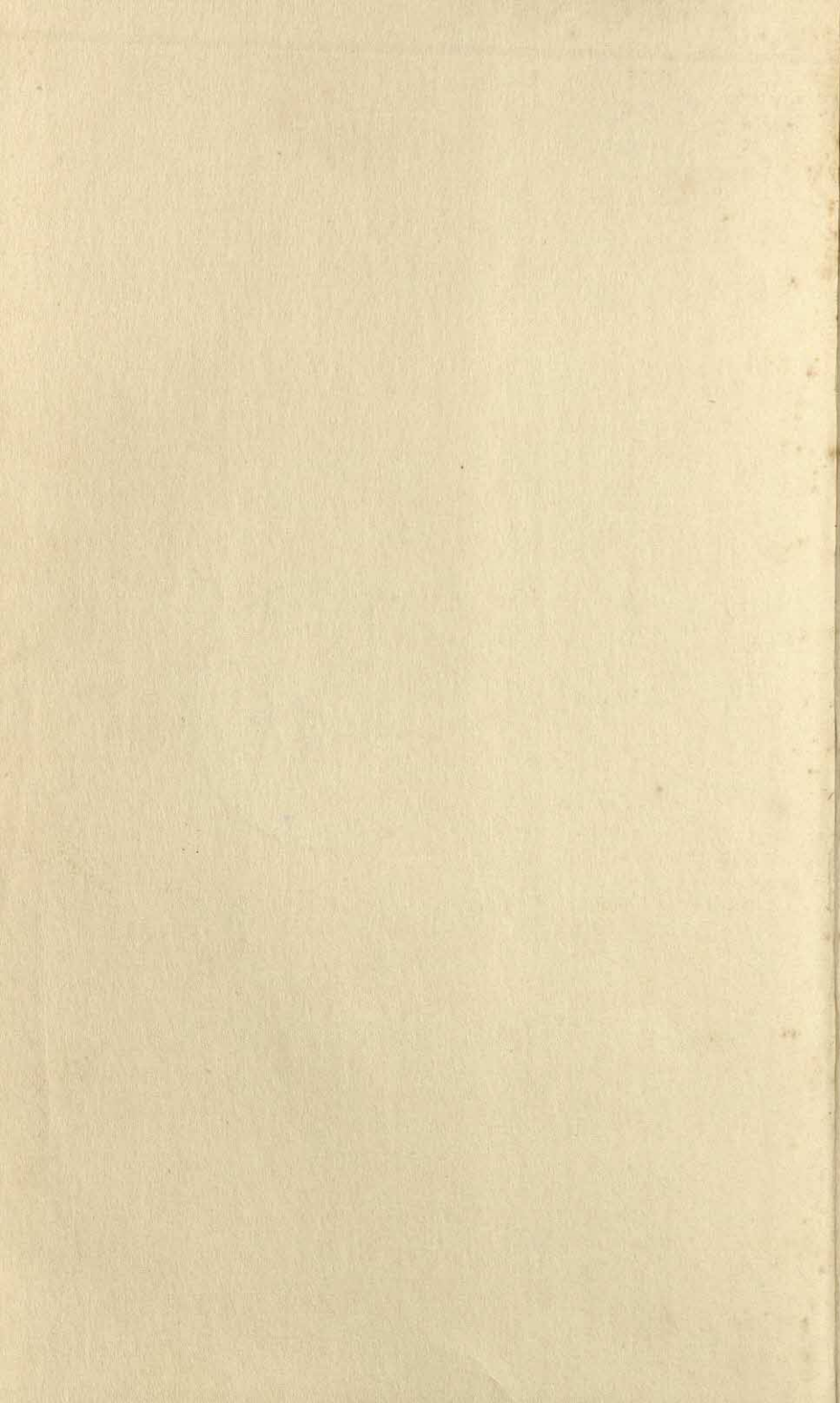
Volume Six of 'Men, Years—Life'



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POST-WAR YEARS

1945-1954



By the same author

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THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF
JULIO JURENITO

THE LOVE OF JEANNE NEY

A STREET IN MOSCOW

THE FALL OF PARIS

RUSSIA AT WAR

THE STORM

THE NINTH WAVE

THE THAW

THE SPRING

CHEKHOV, STENDHAL AND OTHER ESSAYS

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH: 1891-1917

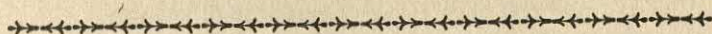
FIRST YEARS OF REVOLUTION: 1918-1921

TRUCE: 1921-1933

EVE OF WAR: 1933-1941

WAR: 1941-1945

ILYA EHRENBURG



Post-War Years
1945—1954

—
Volume VI of
MEN, YEARS - LIFE

★

Translated by
TATIANA SHEBUNINA

in collaboration with
YVONNE KAPP

LONDON
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1966



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TRANSLATORS' NOTE

The translation of this last volume of *Men, Years – Life* is from the text revised by the author for book publication in the U.S.S.R.

Quotations are translated from Ilya Ehrenburg's Russian text, with the following exceptions:

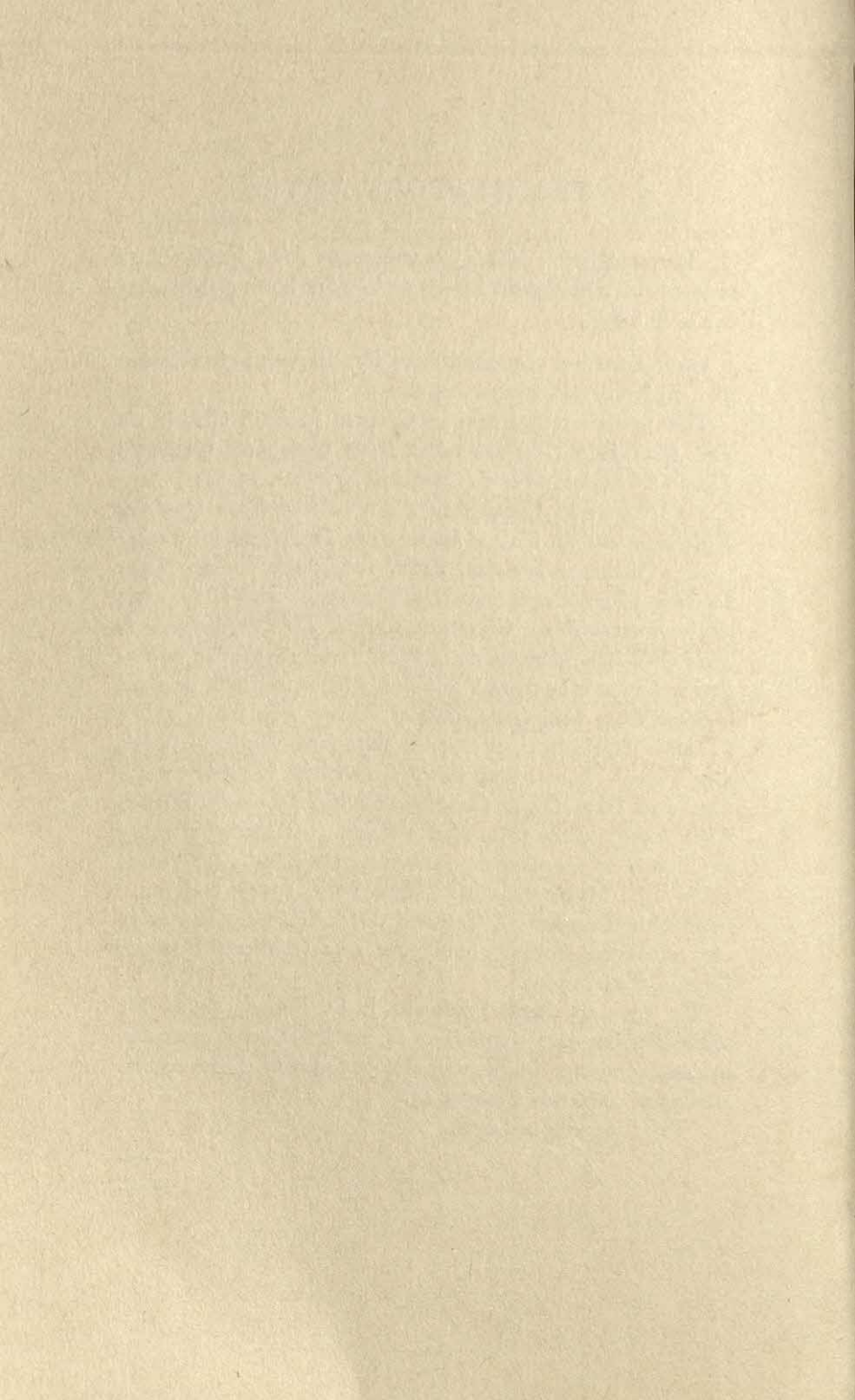
The two short passages in Chapter 10 from Chekhov's *The Man in a Case* are taken from Constance Garnett's *Tales of Chekhov*, vol. 5 (Chatto & Windus, 1918); Joliot-Curie's words in Chapter 20 are translated from *Quelques Réflexions sur la Valeur humaine de la Science* in *Textes Choisis* (Editions Sociales, Paris, 1959); the passage from Sartre in Chapter 24 is from the French transcript of speeches at the Vienna Peace Congress, *Congrès des Peuples pour la Paix* (Editions Défense de la Paix, Paris, 1953); the quotation in Chapter 25 from Van Gogh's letter to Emile Bernard is taken from *Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, vol. 3 (Thames & Hudson, 1958); the lines from Pablo Neruda's *Los Veinte Poemas* and *Canto General* in Chapter 27 are translated from *Obras Completas* (Editions Losada, Buenos Aires, 1956); those from Nazim Hikmet's *Twentieth Century* in Chapter 29 are taken from *Poems*, translated by Ali Yunus (Masses & Mainstream Inc., New York, 1954); and those from Eluard's poems *Liberté* and *Gabriel Péri* in Chapter 31 are translated from *Poèmes pour tous* (Editions Français Réunis, Paris, 1959).

We wish to thank Professor J. D. Bernal, F.R.S., for authenticating our translation of his letter to Ehrenburg, originally written in French, and passages of direct speech attributed to him in Chapter 23.

The footnotes are ours.

T. S.

Y. K.



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I

I WONDER whether I was right to end the fifth part of my memoirs with May 1945, since most of the things I shall be writing about in this last volume only began a year later.

All the events and experiences of 1945 were still closely bound up with the war. At the Potsdam Conference and at the Council of Foreign Ministers held in London and Moscow our diplomats had disagreements with the Anglo-Saxons but in the end compromise decisions were nevertheless reached. The exchange of rapturous telegrams and of decorations still went on. Everywhere Nazis and their collaborators were being put on trial; prosecutors had a strenuous time of it. Laval and Quisling were tried and executed. In Belgium, in Holland, in Italy, in Yugoslavia, in Poland and in our own country hardly a day passed without the publication of sentences. The aged Pétain was tried, which was not surprising in view of the leading part he had played in the humiliation of France. Even the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun (the author of delightful novels which I had devoured in my youth) was tried, although he was eighty-five and his admiration for Hitler must have been due to senile decay.

Franco, very much alarmed, was still wriggling; Japan was still resisting. I remember the day when I read the news of the atom bomb. Even the horrors we had lived through had not completely destroyed all human feeling; but now something had happened which removed us to an immeasurable distance from our accepted ideas of morality and spiritual progress. Yet I still believed in those words of Korolenko which I had copied out when a fourth-form schoolboy: 'Man is created for happiness as the bird is created for flight'. Hiroshima was the final refutation of the nineteenth century.

Men of military age suddenly realized how exhausted they were; while the war was still on they had kept going, but as soon as the tension relaxed, many went down with coronaries, high blood pressure and strokes. Obituaries bordered in heavy black succeeded one another.

In July the first batches of demobilized men moved eastwards. They

returned home to the bomb-shattered towns, to the burnt-out villages. They wanted to rest, but life would not let them. Once again I recognized the spiritual strength of our people: life was hard, many went hungry, and yet they carried on with their jobs and worked themselves to the limit.

In the lecture halls of universities and institutes, side by side with callow youths, sat thirty-year-old veterans who had tramped the whole way from the Volga to the Elbe. 'I've got to swot half the night,' one of them said. 'I've forgotten everything I knew, clean forgotten it. And yet I did know things once, I got my school-leaving certificate.' And looking at him I thought: of course it's hard, harder than he thinks, for he's now got a second certificate, a second maturity¹. We remembered only too well what was behind us, but we tried to think of the future; we made plans, we dreamt both to ourselves and aloud.

There were individual tragedies: one man said that he had lost his skill; another complained that he had been refused living accommodation. A young lieutenant kept on saying: 'As if it weren't bad enough without that, he has to be called Peter too'. He had come back to his home to find that his wife had a new 'husband' about whom to avoid hurting him she had never written; and to crown it all, the man had the same name as her real husband. The lieutenant felt murderous, but in the end they all sat down to supper together and afterwards the couple saw him off to the station. He decided to go to Tallin where he had been demobilized and on his way there called on me to 'get the thing off his chest'.

'They're quite out of hand,' a professor said to me speaking of his moustached, grim-faced first-year students. This made me smile to myself: I too was quite out of hand. I had begun planning a novel as far back as 1944, but I got started on *The Storm* only in January 1946; it took a long time before I could contemplate the war with any detachment. I did not understand at first what was the matter with me, but later on, after closely observing other people, I saw that it was not so easy to be done with the war; we had all been poisoned by it.

I used to plan how, once the war was over, I should rest, wander through woods and meadows and then settle down to write my novel. But in the event I felt unable to stay in one place, and so I took to travel.

¹ The school-leaving certificate is called 'certificate of maturity'.

At the end of June I went to Leningrad where I had not been since June 1941. (Every time I visit this city it stirs me deeply; after Moscow – and I love Moscow where I spent my childhood and early youth – it is restful to the eye; the streets of Leningrad are close to nature; sky and water are part of the city's landscape.) Traces of the terrible years were visible everywhere; each house bore a wound or scar. There were still notices on walls here and there, warning against the danger of walking on this or that side of the street. Many houses had scaffolding up; most of the workers were women. People spoke jokingly about these 'cosmetic repairs'. What saddened me, however, was not so much the buildings as the people. Scanning the crowds I was struck by the fact that so few among them were natives of Leningrad. The majority had come from other towns, districts, villages. And those who had lived through the blockade described its horrors for hours on end; what they had to tell was common knowledge yet each time it brought a lump to my throat.

On 9th July there was a partial eclipse of the sun. People stood about in the streets watching it. Suddenly darkness fell, a cold wind blew and birds fluttered about wildly. A boy of about ten commented disparagingly: 'That's nothing. Now when they were shelling us from Voronya hill . . .'

Second-hand bookshops were stacked with rare books: the private libraries of Leningraders who had died of hunger. I picked up a volume at random. The assistant said: 'Congratulations', but I felt no pleasure at all. It was a collection of Blok's poems inscribed to some unknown woman. I do not know to this day whether this was a casual autograph or a page out of Blok's life; I do not know who had owned the book before the war: an old acquaintance of the poet's, her children or a bibliophile. But like a charm the sight of Blok's handwriting evoked the Petrograd of long ago, the shades of the departed, the history of a generation.

A poster caught my eye: 'Show of Active Service Dogs and Dogs that Survived the Blockade'. In the place of honour sat a sheepdog called Dinah, with one ear missing. A notice said that she had detected five thousand mines. The dog eyed the visitors rather mournfully, at a loss to understand why they were interested in her when, after all, she had done only what men had been doing and had got off lightly, at the cost of an ear. There must have been some fifteen dogs which had survived the blockade, small skinny mongrels; they were held by

their owners, small skinny old women, who had shared their own famine rations with them.

(A certain author wrote to me that in these memoirs I have too much to say about dogs: 'a lordly fad', he calls it. As I read his letter I thought not only of Kashtanka¹ but of the little old women of Leningrad. I must say it once again: my memoirs are essentially a personal account of a single life, one out of a multitude of lives; it would be as justifiable to accuse me of constantly bringing up Paris and making no mention of Chicago, or of speaking about Jews while keeping silent about Icelanders.)

The Dog Show reminded me of the story of two Leningrad poodles, Urs and Kus. They belonged to I. A. Gruzdyov, the biographer of Gorky, one of the Serapions. Once, in the early days of the blockade, Gruzdyov's wife brought home a two-days' ration of bread. The telephone rang in the hall; she forgot about the hungry dogs, and when she remembered them she ran back into the room. The poodles were eyeing the bread and dribbling at the mouth; they proved to have more self-discipline than many a human being. Soon after, Gruzdyov shot Urs and fed his flesh to Kus who survived but became suspicious and gloomy. I do not wish to impose my tastes on others. One may have no love for dogs but there are some stories about them that are worth a thought.

In Pushkin, on the walls of the ruined palace, I saw inscriptions in Spanish: here mercenaries of the 'Blue Division' had disported themselves, evidently expecting that any day now they would be marching through the streets of Leningrad. I caught myself thinking about the war all the time. There is a line by Anna Akhmatova about Pushkin in Tsarskoye Selo: 'Here lay his tricorne and a shabby volume of Parny'². Pushkin's statue was safely recovered from where they had had time to bury it; his tricorne was also found near by. The statue of the goddess of peace lay overturned. In his day it had inspired Innokenty Annensky to write the following verse which I have often repeated: 'O give me eternity, and I shall surrender eternity in exchange for indifference to the wounds and the years'. No, the exchange cannot be made, and not only because we do not possess eternity, but because neither the wounds nor the years can be forgotten.

¹ Main character in a Chekhov story.

² French poet (1753-1814).

In Peterhof the palace had been destroyed. They said: 'We shall rebuild it'. I understood that there was to be a new building, a copy. The Germans had cut down three thousand ancient trees in the palace grounds.

On 8th July the defenders of Leningrad, the Leningrad Guards Army Corps, entered the city. I stood near the Kirov factory. Old workers treated the soldiers to tots of vodka. The women had brought wild flowers picked where they had blossomed on the waste ground in the suburbs. It was all extraordinarily simple and moving.

In the evening L. A. Govorov invited me to his *dacha*. In a wonderful White Night we sat on the verandah talking about the war years. Govorov happened to mention the beauty of Leningrad and suddenly began to recite: 'What power is hidden within him! And in this steed what fire! Whither do you gallop, proud steed, and where will you plant your hooves?' After a short silence he added: 'The people have become more intelligent, there's no doubt about it'.

One day, at a small gathering of writers, we were sitting discussing one thing and another. Beria had just been awarded the title of Marshal. Olga Bergholtz suddenly asked me: 'Tell me, do you think the year thirty-seven can repeat itself, or is that out of the question now?' 'No,' I replied, 'I don't think it can.' Olga laughed: 'You don't sound quite sure'.

A young girl came to me and said: 'You're bound to write about the war. I lived and worked here right through the blockade and kept a diary. Read it, perhaps you'll find it useful. Let me have it back afterwards, I want it as a memento'. That night I began reading the exercise-book. The entries were laconic: so many ounces of bread; so many degrees of frost; Vasilyev died; Nadya died; her sister died. Then my attention was arrested by entries like: 'all last night *Anna Karenina*', 'all through the night *Madame Bovary*'. When the girl came to fetch her diary I asked her: 'How did you manage to read at night? After all, there was no light'. 'Of course there wasn't. You see, at night I remembered the books I'd read before the war. This helped me to fight against death'. I know few words that have affected me more deeply; many a time I have quoted them abroad when trying to explain what enabled us to hold out. Those words bear witness not only to the power of art, they are also a pointer to the character of our society. Long ago Yuri Olesha wrote a play in which the heroine made out two lists: in one she enumerated what she called the 'crimes' of the

Revolution, in the other its 'benefits'. Much has been said in the last years about that first list, although the crimes cannot in any sense be attributed to the Revolution, for they were committed in contradiction to its principles. As for the 'benefits', these are indeed an integral part of it. If I remember rightly, it is in the same play that the heroine says that the Revolution put the book and the terrestrial globe into the hands of the shepherd.

The girl who kept the diary was born in 1918 in a remote village of the Vologda region. She studied at the Pedagogical Institute and at the outbreak of war became a hospital nurse. The essential nature of Soviet society lies not only in the fact that during the terrible nights of the blockade she was able to recall the wonderful books she had read in the past, but also in her surprise at my surprise. This realization sustained me later during some of the most difficult moments.

I went to see Liza Polonskaya. She told me about her life during the evacuation to the Kama. Her son was in the army. We talked about the war, about Auschwitz, about France, about the future. I was suddenly reminded of the Paris street near the zoological gardens, of the barking of sea-lions in the night, of poetry lessons, and I fell silent. It is bitter to meet one's youth, especially when there is no peace in one's heart; you are moved, you try to poke fun at yourself, and tenderness mingles with the bitterness.

No sooner had I got back to Moscow than I felt the urge to leave again. P. I. Lavut who used to arrange Mayakovsky's poetry readings came to see me (there is a line of Mayakovsky that goes: 'It was told me by a quiet Jew, Pavel Ilyich Lavut'). He suggested arranging some lectures for me and asked me where I should like to go. For some reason I chose Yaroslavl and Kostroma. The steamer sailed down a straight canal for a long time. People talked about those who had not returned, compared markets in different towns; some drank and sang; I tried to sleep, but sleep would not come.

I liked Kostroma with its wide squares, its old bazaar, its Tobacco Arcade, its Ipatyevsky Monastery. And I was given a friendly welcome. The secretary of the Regional Committee asked me to dinner. (Lavut was touched.) Young poets gathered and read me their poems. At the galleries they let me see collections not on show. During the early years of the Revolution Moscow used to send paintings by young artists to provincial museums, and these pictures reminded me of exhibitions in the Moscow streets of those days: the Cubists, the Con-

structivists, the Suprematists. One still-life caught my eye. It turned out to be by Korovin. When I expressed my surprise that it could not be hung in the gallery the director threw up his hands: 'How could it? What we've got here shows the influence of the Impressionists, it's a departure from Realism'.

After the lecture a retired captain came up to me and introduced himself as one of my readers. He limped at my side down the long street: 'Now here's a thing you ought to describe. I, shall we say, fought all through the war, starting in Lvov, I went on reconnaissance, was wounded four times, the last time at Budapest, and no one ever said of me, for instance, that I was a coward. Now yesterday he summoned me to the town council. And he started shouting. I know well enough that it's his fault, he told me himself that there was no roofing-felt and so there was no need to hurry, but what could I say: he's a general, a marshal, God Almighty. In short, he called me a coward. Now you must write and explain how this could happen. Only please don't mention me by name, he'll grind me to dust, and better not mention Kostroma either; just describe it as an interesting example of human behaviour'.

At the Ipatyevsky Monastery I stood for a long time before an old stove; one of its glazed bricks bore an inscription under a picture of two trees: 'When one dies, another is born'. That summer I wrote several poems, all of them about trees. Recalling my youth: 'I lived hazily and uncertainly, and spoke of other things. But I remember a big tree, inky against a pale blue background. And I remember a sick woman. I do not know who loved whom, but compulsively and timidly I took her hand and let it fall. Long ago all has been lost, there is not even a trace left of the pain, but somewhere that tree is still rustling as before'. And about courage: 'There was grass, downtrodden like a slave, the gentle dew sparkled and the swallow exchanged the eaves for the tender skies. And only you, great tree, have remained at your post – a soldier who has been given the task of defending a height'. I spoke about my life, about what I had written and wanted to write: 'I lived with them, I heard their stories, dear chestnut-trees, olive-trees, elms. It is not landscape, not background, not adornment, in a tree there is both destiny and permanence. I shall go, and they will remain on guard. I have begun to speak, and they will voice it to the end'.

Probably the reason I wrote poetry was because the spiritual

upheaval of the recent years had not yet died down. My poems were printed in the magazines *Zvezda* (The Star) and *Leningrad*. But I was about to say a long farewell to poetry.

I do not remember how the lecture at Yaroslavl went, but there I met Yadviga. She smiled kindly at me as she had done at Koktebel. There was no denying it, my youth was trying to find me.

Yadviga worked at the Pedagogical Institute and her daughter Tanya lived with her. Tanya was engaged. Yadviga seemed to have changed very little, she had the same voice, the same eyes. A daughter, with a *fiancé* . . . I suddenly felt how long life is. You live from one day to the next, and fail to notice it. Surely old age must take everyone unawares.

We strolled along the quay and visited ancient churches. A woman storekeeper complained of her lot: she had several children, her husband had been reported missing and they refused to give her a pension. Students asked me: 'Will Japan capitulate soon?' 'To whom will Trieste belong – the Yugoslavs or the Italians?' 'Why has no writer written a *War and Peace*?' In the market they were selling lumps of sugar and blouses brought back as 'trophies'. And at my side walked Yadviga, just as in Moscow a quarter of a century before.

As soon as I got back to Moscow I left again for Kiev. The Kreshchatik¹ was gone, but geraniums flowered in stone urns and militiamen regulated the traffic. I went up Institute Street. Here had stood the house where I was born, now a heap of rubble. I sat for a long time by the Dniepr, and again the war rose before me. Lapin's telephone call, the crossing of the Dniepr, years that merged into one single interminable day. It came to me that I should soon set about writing my book and this meant that for a long time to come the war would remain firmly lodged in my room, in my mind, in my heart. I went to see Tychina, Bazhan, Golovonivsky and A. Kagan. I spent an evening at an officer's place in the Podol. He had stopped me in the street, saying that we had met at Minsk, invited me to his house, bought half a litre of vodka and a sausage, and related at length how his sons had grown up, had studied, had gone to the war and had not come back. 'Why were *they* killed and not I? My wife stayed behind in Kiev. In Babi Yar.' It was late when I left him to wander for a long time up and down the humpbacked streets. Day broke. I was lost in thought

¹ Main street in Kiev.

and found myself standing by a chestnut-tree, talking perhaps to myself, perhaps to the tree. A few hours later I left the town.

In Moscow a complete stranger came to see me and said: 'Forgive this intrusion, it's difficult to get you by telephone. I'm Kolarov, the Bulgarian Communist'. Our lift was out of order, and my first thought was: how did he manage to climb up? He must be nearly seventy. But Kolarov was smiling and smoking one cigarette after another. He said he wanted me to come to Bulgaria and write about that country: 'They read you in the West too'. I agreed at once.

A few days later G. F. Alexandrov rang up and asked me to come to see him. He was very affable and talked flatteringly about my articles. 'We second the request of our Bulgarian friends.' I felt a sudden urge to ask him why in April he had not answered my letter, but immediately realized that it would be no use because he would never be able to explain anything to me. I merely said that after Bulgaria I wanted to go to Yugoslavia (this was also a continuation of the war for, of all the countries seized by the Nazis, Yugoslavia had proved the most obdurate). Alexandrov replied: 'Of course', then asked me where my articles had been published in the last few months, although he certainly knew this as well as I did. 'In *Pravda*, in *Izvestia*.' He advised me to get fixed up with *Izvestia* and send regular contributions to that paper: 'After all, you're an old *Izvestia* man'. Something made me think aloud: 'True enough. But I'm rather more of a dog than a cat: I get accustomed less to places than to people. There's nobody whom I used to work with left on *Izvestia*. Still, what does it matter? It might as well be *Izvestia*'. Alexandrov was glad to be spared explanations and shook me warmly by the hand.

In the two-berth compartment the upper bunk was occupied by a shabbily dressed girl who lay with a huge sack under her head. When the guard suggested making up the bed she exclaimed: 'On no account!' She began to speak to me on the second day, after she had learnt who I was. (I do not remember how it came about; I think an officer travelling in the next compartment mentioned my name.) She made a full confession to me. In the sack, which I had noticed at once, were lengths of material. She was going to a small Ukrainian town where her mother lived, she would sell the material there and buy flour and lard. She was a student at the Textile Institute and her husband, also a student, was studying philology. 'All he can do is read. And do you know how we live? I don't remember when we last ate

our fill. It's all right for me, I'm strong, but he's got TB and needs a high-calorie diet. You don't know him, of course, but truly he's a wonderful person.' And the young black-marketeer was transformed into a Juliet awkwardly talking about her love. She had managed to get her ticket by pulling strings and had practically no money on her, just enough for a porter when she changed trains, otherwise her sack might be stolen. I offered her some sandwiches but she refused them; I laid some bread and a sausage on the top bunk and later heard her chewing. She had to change trains during the night; as she said good-bye she added: 'Don't think too badly of me, you're a writer, you ought to understand. Perhaps it's not worth while taking a porter?' Two years later, at a readers' conference in the Textile Institute, a girl student came up to me: 'Do you remember me?' I did at once: 'Well, how did it go? Did you take a porter?' She laughed: 'No, I lugged it myself'.

An officer in the compartment next to mine had a small girl of about eight with him. 'We picked her up near Baranovichi. The Germans had killed her parents. After I was wounded I worked with the medical corps. She's grown quite fond of me. And my wife writes telling me to bring her with me. My wife's an invalid, she's had four operations. We've got no children. Before the war I had a decent job. I fought in a tank brigade, and then, after I was wounded, I landed up in the medical corps - got a bad arm. Well, never mind, I'll manage. We'll get along somehow. It's dull without children. After all, I'm forty-two. She's a nice child. It'll make my wife happy.' The little girl was shy and did not open her mouth.

In Odessa I strolled about the streets for some time: it was a sad town; there were many ruins, and there were people walking bare-footed, in ragged clothing. Misfortune does not suit Odessa; it had the air of an ill-used, bedraggled, tear-stained lady of fashion. I was given a night's lodging in a magnificent neglected mansion where a Rumanian general had lived during the occupation. The handsome parquet floor of the spacious room was charred as if someone had tried to start a bonfire. Over the wide chromium-plated bedstead hung a broken Venetian chandelier.

I lay down and all at once felt desperately tired. Of course I ought to have taken a rest during the summer, but then I have no capacity for resting. I long to see unknown countries. And that means meetings and lectures. I shall have to dictate articles over the telephone. Then I

shall sit down to write a novel, and once again in all probability I shall not think it out to the end. As in Paris in 1932, in the rue du Cotentin, I sat in judgment on myself. But in Paris I had been critical of my hesitations, of the fact that I remained aloof from life, whereas now I reproached myself for neglecting art, for hastiness, for a reluctance to think things out to the end. There was, however, something in common between the past and the present self-accusations. Verses I had written two months before came back to me: 'I lived hazily and uncertainly, and spoke of other things . . .' Now that was true: too often I had spoken of other things, and not of those that were of the greatest importance to me. I have rather a saturnine appearance but inwardly there is a good deal of irresponsibility. It was about time I began to think things out. In the past it had seemed to me that old age must be easy and natural; that gradually one's passions were spent and one's desires died down. It must have been on that night in Odessa, under the broken chandelier, that I realized for the first time that this was all nonsense, that what was spent was not one's passions but one's strength.

On the next day I flew to Bucharest from where I intended to go on to Sofia. The plane was still a wartime one with iron benches. It pitched and tossed over the Black Sea but I went on jotting down notes about the officer with the little girl, about Odessa, about Pushkin and about my own lamentable irresponsibility. Suddenly the plane started coming in to land – and again I had not finished thinking it out, writing it down. There was a large crowd on the airfield: they had come to meet the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Petru Groza, who, together with Tatarescu, was returning from Moscow.

I was met by the secretary of the Embassy S. A. Dangulov and Major Levy of the Control Commission who told me that I ought to stay for a while and see Bucharest and other parts of Rumania. I was easily persuaded. The major took me to an hotel. It was as hot as summer, it was noisy and colourful. Forgetting my night thoughts I began greedily observing the strange faces. This was seventeen years ago, and today I am perfectly certain that I was right to take myself to task that night in Odessa. Some proverbs do not lie, and it is true that a hunchback is straightened out only by the grave.

2

MY APPREHENSIONS were justified: faces, towns, countries flashed past. To get to know a place really well one must live there for some time, make friends and enemies, experience not only joy but also unhappiness, and even find the leisure to feel bored. What awaited me was something very different; in the space of four months I visited seven countries: Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany. There was a time when people dreamt of a flying-carpet, now the carpets fly on schedule, and the air hostess with her conventional smile announces: 'We shall be flying at an altitude of 30,000 feet, dinner will be served . . .' But there is one item in the old fairy stories which I should still love to possess: the cap of invisibility. In Bulgaria and Yugoslavia I sometimes wangled a day off, or played truant like a schoolboy and slipped away to an artist's studio, or drank *slivovice* with former partisans in a dark tavern, or sought out some author whose work had caught my fancy, meeting him not at a conference or at the Writers' Union headquarters, but in some quiet spot where one could have an intimate chat. These were brief respites. Every day I had to give a talk or make a speech at some meeting, be interviewed, attend official functions, inspect former or future palaces, dine with Ministers, military men, and even monks. In my hotel room I dashed off articles for *Izvestia*, as I had done ten years earlier; but at that time everything had been new to me, whereas now I often glowered resentfully at the typewriter.

Chekhov, when still at his Antosha Chehonte stage, said that medicine was his lawful wife and literature his mistress. He had studied medicine for many years, had qualified and had practised. But I had taken up politics before I reached sixteen. And then? Then an epoch set in when politics took *me* up, as it did hundreds of millions of others, and this was less like the reproaches of a jealous wife than the exigencies of a matriarch who demanded not tokens of love but the hide of a hunted beast.

It was the first post-war year, and a mist, like that before the dawn, hung over ruined, exhausted Europe. According to the Bible, when

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starting on his task the Creator divided the light from the darkness on the first day of creation, putting off the separation of the waters from the dry land till the morrow. In 1945 no one yet dared to divide the anti-Hitler coalition either on the international plane or within individual States. Some were probably playing poker, others were nursing illusions. From the outside it looked idyllic. At the opening session of the French Constituent Assembly General de Gaulle and Maurice Thorez sat side by side on the government bench. And in a park near Bucharest I saw the young King Michael who had just been awarded the Soviet Order of Victory.

Two years later everything settled down in its proper place. In May 1947 the Communist Ministers were dropped from the French government, and in November of that year the Liberal Tatarescu and the Social-Democrat Petrescu were excluded from the Rumanian government. In Rumania, in Bulgaria, in Hungary I was received by what the barber at the Writers' Club used to call 'aces and nobs'. The majority of them soon quitted the stage: some of them were imprisoned, some emigrated and others were given sinecures where they could abandon themselves to memories of their stormy past.

I met not only Ministers but also Rumanian landowners, Bulgarian tobacco exporters and Croatian bishops. Here is one story briefly told. The export of tobacco was of prime importance for Bulgaria. In the south they grow *jebel*, the most expensive kind of tobacco. Suddenly the American tobacco firms announced that they could not buy *jebel* from Bulgaria since the Bulgarian government had not been recognized by the USA. The Moscow meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers recommended that the Bulgarian government should be supplemented by two additional Ministers representing forces other than those belonging to the Fatherland Front. The Bulgarians raked up the Ministers but failed to win American approval. The *jebel* remained unsold.

Behind the scenes a preliminary rehearsal of 1947 was taking place but on the stage the pastoral was still being played out. When photographed Byrnes invariably linked arms with Molotov. Truman sent touching telegrams to Stalin. At a reception in Belgrade an English general showered praises on Tito's sheepdog. In Bucharest the French ambassador invited me to lunch, together with some Rumanians, and we drank to 'eternal friendship' as a matter of course.

When I visited the Rumanian village of Coşereni I talked to the

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peasants; they did not know whether to welcome the agrarian reform or not, because they were afraid that the landlord Constantinescu might take the land back and furthermore flog them for seizing his property. I went to see the landowner who received me amiably and treated me to plum-brandy. When I mentioned the agrarian reform he said politely: 'That business isn't yet settled'. I tried to find out what at least he expected, but he would not give me a direct answer and switched the conversation to the terrifying power of atom bombs.

In Budapest one could get an excellent dinner in the restaurant of the Bristol Hotel. I paid 15,000 pengő for mine, while the average monthly salary of an office worker was 150,000. There were some American and English officers in the restaurant. A Hungarian, slightly in his cups, went up to the Americans, raised his glass and said loudly: 'To our second liberation!'

It was difficult to forget about the war, it kept obtruding at every step. I was present at the solemn opening of the first bridge linking Buda to Pest. And beautiful Buda, with its elaborate and gay baroque, presented a fantastic heap of ruins. I thought about the Hungarians in Voronezh, but victory allowed one to see things in a different way. The most painful sight was that of the ruined cities which could never be restored: Buda, Dresden, Nuremberg. Minsk was rebuilt, but the frescoes of the Neredita Church of Our Saviour in Novgorod cannot be restored. Of course, for a homeless man a roof is the all-important thing; but a year and ten years go by, he is living in a new house, he has forgotten cold and hunger, and he begins sadly to miss beauty; and beauty cannot be brought back by any kind of planning. I saw the ruins of Ploesti, Sofia, Zadar, Podgoritsa, Fiume, Niš, Koritza, Brno and then those of German towns. Dear God, how like one shattered house is to another! You had to concentrate in order to realize that this was Podgoritsa and not Rzhev or Sofia or Minsk.

Everywhere people mourned their dead; the shades of the dead lived on among the living, the shades of those killed in Lika, in Montenegro, in Slovakia, in Bulgarian Dupnitsa. In Yugoslavia a woman told me that she had had seven children and lost them all. When I was in Prague I learnt the details of the shooting of Vančura, whom I remembered well, and went to see the death camp of Terezin. Before the war there were 400,000 Montenegrins, 85,000 of them perished.

The Balkans and Central Europe were devastated. I made notes of

what was to be found in the shops of various countries: 'candlesticks (no candles to be had); butter-dishes (no butter); paper flowers, vanilla powder, safes, chandeliers, red pepper, bootlaces (people go about in tattered footwear, some without any at all)'. In Budapest thin slices of pumpkin were being hawked in the streets. One cigarette cost 250 pengö. In Bulgaria there was no milk, and before I was told this I knew it merely by looking at the children. In Montenegro people went hungry; the local authorities said there were no lorries to bring in the flour. Albanian soldiers paraded barefooted. Everywhere there was endless talk about ration-cards, the black market, fantastic prices. The most fashionable articles were capacious women's handbags into which one could put such casual bits of shopping as a cake of soap, an aubergine, coffee made of chicory, or a swede. In Germany I saw shopping bags (at home we call them *avoski*¹), daintily trimmed with medal-ribbons; someone had evidently got hold of a lot of these ribbons and, what was more important, had found a use for them.

There were people who lived in a kind of daze, nervously looking over their shoulders when they came out into the street, and if they did dream of anything, it was of a pre-war dinner. Others were consumed with a fever for meetings, processions and songs. In the squares of Yugoslav towns young people danced the *kolo* well into the night.

At the very outset of my journey, after crossing the Danube by ferry, I found myself in the Bulgarian town of Ruse. I was pounced upon and carried shoulder-high for a long time – it seemed to be the custom. I must confess that it is no more comfortable than being tossed in the air. The same thing happened in every Bulgarian town: for the young people it was both an expression of their feelings and a sport. They would career round the town square some ten times, and no pleading to be set down on my feet had the smallest effect.

On one of my last evenings in Sofia I was taken to the opera for a performance of *Il Trovatore*, and during the interval I was told that I must appear on the stage. There stood the Minister of Arts, Dimo Kazasov, various officials and writers, and the whole cast in medieval costume. The Minister decorated me with the Grand Cross of the Order of St Alexander, which is worn round the neck with an additional large star on the left side. The audience went berserk, while I, feeling like an actor appearing for the first time, was ready to sink

¹ From *avos*: perhaps (hopefully).

through the trapdoor. In Split thousands of people wanted to shake hands with me, I was afraid I should not hold out. In Tirana, where I arrived in the evening worn out by the journey over ruts and potholes, I had no sooner left the car than they propelled me into the theatre. It was 7th November, the anniversary of the October Revolution, and the theatre was packed. There were dancers on the stage; one of them said something in a strange language, everybody started clapping and I clapped too, but then it turned out that the applause was for me, and I could no longer make out who were the actors and who the Ministers. The Albanians have the temperament of southerners; I had the impression that the whole thing was going on for ever. On Lake Ohrid in Albania I was formally handed over to the Macedonians, whereupon a meeting was laid on at once.

I was seeing the Balkans for the first time. In so short a period as two months it is, of course, difficult to get the hang of the colourful life, the strange manners and customs, but I did my best to see people in various walks of life and to understand the character of these dissimilar countries.

What struck me in Rumania was its contradictions. In the centre of Bucharest the former polish was still in evidence, but a hundred and twenty miles away from the capital, in the Jiu Valley coalfields, many people lived in caves like animals. Even in Bucharest itself there was no lack of contrasts: a peasant woman in homespun would pass an exquisitely elegant lady in the street, oxen would hold up a ministerial Cadillac. I saw magnificent mansions and smoke-blackened hovels. A Maecenas wined and dined me, and talked about Lautréamont, Breton and Joyce and of how well known they were in Rumania, but in the villages I saw peasants who put crosses for signatures because they could not write their names. Out of seven thousand doctors four thousand practised in the capital; the peasants just died in the old-fashioned way. Rumania often suffers from drought, and the year 1945 was a particularly cruel one. Peasant women wept as they spoke of a husband or a son; they did not understand why there had been a war: 'They dragged him off to Russia, and afterwards said he'd been killed'.

What I found endearing was the good nature and the light-heartedness of the people. Wherever *mamaliga* (Indian corn) and wine were to be had, people knew how to make merry. One day I came upon a village wedding. The bride wept a little as a matter of form, according

to custom, and then joined in the dance. A fir-tree with a loaf hanging from it was carried round. Plum-brandy was drunk out of flat, brightly decorated wooden flagons. The fiddler played all night. I found it a rest from formal receptions: all they knew about me was that I was a Russian, they saw that I had no intention of taking anything away from them, and the elderly host said: 'An unexpected guest is a good omen'.

The Red Army had liberated many countries, the Soviet people had shown its spirit of self-sacrifice, bringing help to yesterday's enemies. But the temper of that period, which is now known as that of the 'personality cult', confused many minds. Rumania's most outstanding poet was Tudor Arghezi. I had read his poems in an inferior French translation and immediately realized that here was true poetry. He came to my lecture, and later we met again and talked. He was then sixty-five. Great complexity of spirit did not deprive him of a capacity for warmth and simplicity in human relations. In the days of the fascists he had experienced both prison and concentration camp. Yet he was looked at askance: 'a decadent', 'a westernizer', 'an individualist'. He bore undeserved slights with dignity. After 1956 there were many changes. New editions of Arghezi's old books appeared, and when I visited Bucharest a few years ago, I heard: 'We've got a poet like Arghezi . . .'

I met Mihail Sadoveanu, and later we travelled together to Bulgaria and had long talks. I grew to like him very much. He had a great leonine head, but his heart was very gentle, and he was a man whom it would have been difficult to embitter. He was ten years my senior and his spirit had been formed in the past century. He combined in a rare degree a genuinely popular feeling and fine craftsmanship. Everybody knew him, and this must have helped him in the difficult period of the late forties; men who neither understood nor even liked art lost their nerve when confronted with Sadoveanu, and suddenly they recalled that he was a classic. As for him, he was no figurehead but an artist, and he loved even those things in art which might have seemed alien to him. He thought highly of Arghezi, who was far removed from him, and hated doggerel verse written to order for a newspaper; he loved true painting and had no use for the vast canvases which were supposed to picture the life of the new Rumania. 'We've deserved this,' he once said to me. 'The gap between us and the millions of illiterate peasants was too great. Of course, these peasants had good taste, imagination, a love of beauty – nowhere else, perhaps, has there

ever been such rich folk art. But when the peasant comes to the town he loses the aesthetic standards which make up his spiritual riches. He admires vulgar statuettes, shoddy furniture, portraits with "expressive" eyes, songs from films. Just listen to the genuine folksongs, not those that have been arranged for choirs. Art will flower anew in another twenty or thirty years from now, when different people with different standards have grown up. But I'm not complaining. It's good that they're teaching the people to read and write, that they're building homes for the workers, that the people can at last eat as much as they want. This means that for art, too, the time will come.' Sadoveanu was a member of the Committee that awarded the international Peace Prizes. Every year he came to Moscow, and although in those days it was difficult to have heart-to-heart talks, I discussed with him things that we both held dear. After a long illness he died in 1961 at the age of eighty.

Bulgaria impressed me as a civilized, lettered, modest and extremely democratic country. The Bulgarians are naturally reserved, they do not wear their hearts on their sleeves, their emotions are well concealed. Almost in every village I noticed a library; the peasants read not only newspapers, but also novels and some even read poetry.

At the railway station I was met by Máté Zalka's comrade-in-arms, General Petrov, *alias* the Under-Secretary for War, Ferdinand Kozlovsky, with a large group of Bulgarians who had fought in Spain. I immediately found myself among friends. It became clear to me within a few days that very old traditions of revolutionary struggle still lived on in Bulgaria. Partisans had fought and died in the days of fascism; that war had begun long before the advance of the Red Army.

I met Stoyanov whom I knew from the Paris Writers' Congress. I made friends with Konstantinov, the chairman of the Union of Writers. Regardless of his position, he spoke to me frankly, expressing his fear of over-simplification and levelling in art. His sister, a painter and a great admirer of Cézanne, told me that at present the academic artists were gaining the upper hand. I heard the same thing from Abreshkov and the young painter Alshekh, a nephew of Pascin. All shared the same affection for Ilya Beshkov; by drawing caricatures whose content was easy to understand he was acceptable to people who feared art. Others saw his value as an artist; he was an excellent draughtsman, and he also knew how to drink; he played the *zurna*, a kind of flute, was familiar with the songs, the customs and the dreams of the people, and

he did not adapt himself to his companion of the moment but adapted his companion to art.

Among the older generation of writers I remember Elin Pelin and his wonderful words: 'Prose should be taut, yet some people write in such a way that you feel you are plodding through a swamp, and if you do not get stuck it is only because you know from the very first page what there will be on the last . . . It is not prose, it is journalese'. One evening the poet Elisaveta Bagriana was reading her tender and pure poems. Next to me sat an official connected with literature, who said: 'It's good but too subjective for our times, like your Akhmatova'. This was in 1945, not in 1946, and I did not start an argument. I also made friends with the young poet Mladen Isayev.

I went to Boyana to see the thirteenth-century frescoes there. Art historians did not notice the Slavonic Renaissance for a long time, treating Bulgarian and Macedonian art as part of Byzantine art. But the portraits at Boyana and at Ohrid differ as much from the formalization, the harshness and the logic of Byzantine art as do the works of Andrey Rublev from those of his teacher, Theophanes the Greek. Rublev saw ancient Greek vases, he was familiar with classical Greek literature; the southern Slavs had seen the monuments of ancient Greece. Byzantium was not a teacher, it was more in the nature of a postman.

(In the late forties, when on Stalin's directives 'autochthony' was cultivated in our country, even Prince Yuri Dolgoruky¹ was remembered but not the great early fifteenth-century painter Andrey Rublev.)

Later, on the shores of Lake Ohrid, in the neighbourhood of Prilep and Skopje I saw eleventh- to twelfth-century frescoes. These paintings go back to a hundred and two hundred years earlier than the Giotto's in Padua. It is sad to reflect that the Slavonic Renaissance had only a morning, for at the end of the fourteenth century the Turks overran and seized Bulgaria and Serbia.

That autumn Yugoslavia was enjoying the pride of liberation. People were excited, they argued, they went into raptures, and it was impossible not to surrender oneself to the gaiety which bubbled over despite the losses, the destruction and the hunger of the people. I found myself in a fascinating country, or more exactly several countries in one. How could one help falling in love with the gentle beauty of

¹ Founder of Moscow.

Dalmatia, with the renaissance palaces, with Dubrovnik, that rival to Venice, with the baroque mansions of Zagreb set against the low background of ochre or pale lemon hills, with clean, spruce Ljubljana, this close relation of Krakow and Prague, with tragic Montenegro? The month I spent driving along the impossible roads of Yugoslavia remains with me as a month filled with pride, with sorrow and with beauty.

It is natural for the visual arts to flourish in this kind of country. I admired the paintings of Petar Lubarda, Marino Tartaglia and others, and visited their studios; at times it was just as if I were in the Paris studios of my youth. In Ljubljana I saw the works of masters of graphic art; in Slovenia, with its high cultural standards, books are loved and cherished.

Ivo Andrić I had already met in Bulgaria, and we had somehow understood one another from the start. He was reserved and said nothing when Zogović and Davićo launched on their interminable wrangles, or else he tried to soften the tone of the dispute, smoking a cigar and smiling. His feet were solidly planted on the ground, not perhaps on the ground where never a day passes but some historic event occurs, but on the ground of art: not on the foothills but on the summit. There is only a year's difference in our ages, and I always think with admiration, even with envy, of my contemporary who during the noisiest years remained silent and wrote, wrote but remained silent. After reading his novels I visualized the Andrić with whom I had talked. Then came the bitter years of estrangement between our two countries. In April 1949 we met at the Paris Peace Congress, and met as friends; but after that I did not see him for many years though he used every opportunity to send greetings, and in the spring of 1965 I went to stay with him in his little house on the Black Sea.

Krleža is another important Yugoslav writer. I came up against the familiar thing: people tried to avoid mentioning him. In Zagreb the authorities whispered in my ear. Now Krleža is highly regarded, but at the time things went badly for him.

While I was standing on a hill in Dubrovnik, an elderly man in an ulster came up to me: 'You don't recognize me?' He was a friend of my youth, the Polish composer Rogowski. We had met in Paris, and later in Brussels. He was romantic by nature and remained so to the end. Fate had brought him to Dubrovnik, and he spoke of the town with delight, although his existence was far from easy.

Rogowski told me about a law introduced in the sixteenth century by the Dubrovnik government: every man intending to get married had to plant seventy olive-trees: the olive-tree has a long life – three or four hundred years – and the rulers of the Republic believed it necessary to work for the future. My thoughts often returned to this law.

Montenegro struck me as exemplifying indomitable firmness, pride and fortitude. The people had carried up a little earth to cover the rock, and the tiny terraced fields looked like window-boxes. The Montenegrins defended this sterile land throughout the centuries. Each time they went off to the wars they kissed the doors of their houses.

One night, in a dark tavern in Cetinje, my travelling companion recited poems by Petar Nyegoš. At the time I took down word for word without elaborating the style the lines that had moved me: 'This world is a tyrant even for the tyrant, and it is doubly oppressive for noble hearts. The sea battles against the shore, the heat against the frost, the wind against the wind, beast against beast, a people against a people, man against man . . .' Rattling along in the car I repeated these bitter words: it was clear that the war did not intend to leave me alone.

In Bratislava and later in Prague I met old friends; many of them were playing an important role in the liberated Republic. Amongst those still living now are only Marie Majerová, Adolf Hoffmeister, Laco Novomeský and Jaroslav Seifert, a wonderful poet and a loyal friend – though a very sick man – from whom I recently received a letter. But at the time we light-heartedly stirred up memories of the past – of *Devetsila* and *Dav* – joked and drank wine.

I spoke both at the Charles University and at noisy meetings. I met Burian who had been in a concentration camp. He immediately asked me how things were with Meyerhold. I said: 'Bad'. He talked about the Nazis, about his new production of *Romeo and Juliet*, and everything seemed mixed up in my mind: the tortures, the victory, Shakespeare, Meyerhold. At an exhibition held in the National Theatre I saw paintings by Emil Filla, Vaclav Špála, František Tichý and Alois Fišárek. Some people said it was formalism. Nezval was furious: 'It's not formalism, it's a revolution'. Halas smiled sadly, Seifert said nothing.

At the publishers I was shown a translation of my collected short stories, *Beyond the Truce*, which had just come out. The book was beautifully produced and the illustrations so 'formalistic' that I was quite taken aback, being by now unaccustomed to this style. I

was told that the translation and the drawings had been done during the occupation. The translator, the artists and the printing workers all signed my copy of the book.

There was a reception at the Hradčany. I met Beneš who said to me with a smile: 'You see, we've come to an understanding with the Slovaks. This has turned out to be rather easier than quite a number of other things'.

I saw a terrible exhibition in Prague. The Nazis had sent the artist Bedřich Fritt to the death camp of Terezin. He made drawings of the doomed men. He perished but other prisoners saved the drawings by burying them. Among the horrifying exhibits hung the photograph of a four-year-old child, the artist's son, whom friends had managed to hide.

We went to Terezin where a hundred and fifty thousand people had died, and we stood there for a long time in the wet snow. Yes, the war was still with us.

So far I have not explained how I came to be in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I was on the point of taking the plane from Belgrade to Moscow when a telegram came from *Izvestia*: 'Please proceed Nuremberg describe trial war-criminals'. I agreed at once, because I wanted to see the tribunal at work and also because I did not want to get into the groove of sitting at my desk and starting on a long novel. (I always find it difficult to get started on a book; I snatch at any excuse to put it off, and at that period my reluctance was reinforced by the fact that I had grown unused to a peaceful life, to staying within four walls, to intellectual concentration.)

Cold winds were blowing in Belgrade. I realized that I was going to the north, that it was December and that I had only a thin summer overcoat. Some officers told me that in Budapest one could buy anything for dollars, and the paper had given me some hard currency. Nevertheless it turned out to be a complicated business. When I asked the shopkeepers for a warm overcoat they smiled ironically: they may have been thinking that I would take the coat without paying. (When I ordered a bottle of wine in a restaurant the waiter insisted on cash in advance.) Or it may have been that there really were no thick coats; they offered me French scents and handsome wallets, in fact all sorts of things which the inhabitants of Budapest could well do without. In one small shop I got into conversation with the owner, told him who I was and explained that I had to get to Nuremberg for the trial. The

man turned out to be a rare bird: a Jew who had survived. He said at once: 'Three furriers are still alive here. If Ilya Ehrenburg's going to Nuremberg, we'll kill ourselves to get him a coat'. Together we made the round of the tailors' shops: there was nothing to be had anywhere. The shopkeeper said something to the others in Hungarian; they gesticulated and shouted. Finally I asked what they were saying. 'It's very simple. We're talking about Ilya Ehrenburg going off to judge the bloody executioners. Now this man's whole family has been wiped out. You can say that at the trial. Though if we were to start on the list of those who've been killed it would take years. He says there aren't any overcoats to be had. That is, I've no doubt some Minister has got two, but he wouldn't give up one. Now this fellow knows a Hungarian who's got some sheepskins tucked away. He liked Horthy, he doesn't like us, but he likes dollars. We'll work all night. Tomorrow you'll set off in a magnificent warm overcoat. Let them see that we can tailor. You must say that all those men should be hanged. As for me, luckily my wife died in the first year of the war, and we had no children, but they killed my brother and all his family'.

The coat was made. In Prague I was given a car to go to Nuremberg. One more road that spoke of war: ruins, army transport, sentries. We drove slowly, the traffic was dense: American troops were leaving western Czechoslovakia.

My thoughts dwelt on what fascism had meant to unhappy Europe: it had not only destroyed towns and killed millions of people, it had also poisoned the minds of the survivors. The weeds of racism and of nationalism had spread widely. I recalled a fight between two old men, a Hungarian and a Rumanian, who spat into each other's faces. I recalled how in Rijeka the Italians cursed the Slovenes, how in a German village not far from Budapest the peasants swore they would pay back the 'accursed Hungarians'. In Skopje all the streets bore numbers, as if it were New York, although Skopje is a small town: formerly the street names had been Serbian, then they became Bulgarian, and the Macedonians had opted for neutral figures. In Bucharest, in Budapest the surviving Jews said that they could often hear remarks like: 'You lousy bastard, pity Hitler missed you'. I saw Sudeten Germans wearing white armbands – a symbol of humiliation – and I felt how terrible it was to be repaying fascism in its own coin. Depressing thoughts. My driver described what it had been like under the occupation: 'They spat into your soul'.

Darkness fell. All around were the ruins of German towns. We asked the Americans how far it was to Nuremberg, but nobody knew. Suddenly the driver said: 'It looks as if we've got off the road'. We drove back. I dozed. I dreamt that I was in Elbing. They would start shooting in a moment . . . And sure enough, I was woken up by the sound of a shot. The driver swore: 'The idiot, standing there in the road, shooting'. The trigger-happy American soldier told us with a grin that it was three miles to Nuremberg.

Ruins, ruins: you would not think it was a town. 'Where are we supposed to go?' I pondered: it was night, impossible to find anyone. We drove to the American *Komandatura*. I asked an officer where the Russian journalists were to be found. He said he did not know, we should have to wait for the major. 'Are you Russian?' he smiled. 'You guys sure know how to fight', and tossing up a packet of cigarettes on his palm he gave it to me. Soldiers came and went. I kept asking the officer how much longer we should have to wait. He smiled and each time replied: 'The major'll be along any time now'. The Czech and I smoked half the packet of cigarettes. At last we could stand it no longer; I wanted to sleep. We got up. The American smiled again: 'The major's a bit late. But I'll get you fixed up'. He called a GI who was dozing in a corner: 'Take them over to the hotel. And come right back here - the major'll be along'. The GI yawned and said: 'Let's get going. But the major won't show up, he's in the hotel bar, drinking whisky. Sure, I've been to the trial. Goering's a fat guy, but it's not all that interesting. What I'm interested in is when they're going to let me go back home. Here's the hotel. I'm not allowed in. I'll go wait for the major'.

3

THE SPACIOUS lounge of the Nuremberg Grand Hotel was crowded with journalists, legal experts and American officers. In the bar people were drinking cocktails; a lady in a very low-cut dress sang American songs (with a German accent); there was dancing. There was a bar all right, but there was no roof, and the staircase had not yet been repaired. I was given a room on the second floor and clambered up to it partly by ladder, partly over loose boards.

The old part of Nuremberg had been almost completely wiped out. In the evening the streets, cluttered with rubble and broken roof-tiles, seemed dead. I went out early in the morning and saw schoolchildren and women with shopping-bags; an elderly man in a green hat was selling newspapers, plans of the town and old postcards; a tram passed; the town lived, but it was a strangely unreal, confused kind of life. In a factory that had escaped destruction they were making cigarette-cases with the legend: 'Souvenir of the International Military Tribunal'. The American soldiers loved souvenirs.

I do not think that in any other place there have ever gathered so many journalists from every country in the world; the majority of them lived on the estate of the pencil king Faber. But I stayed on at the Grand Hotel and learnt to climb quite nimbly to my room. Everybody lunched in the canteen attached to the law courts; you took a tray and filed past ten American soldiers who, like expert jugglers, ladled out soup, poured coffee, and slung potatoes and slices of bread on to the plates.

The trial was held in the Palace of Justice; a mural painting showed Adam and Eve and the serpent. Fluorescent lighting had been installed, as well as cabins for the interpreters and cameramen, but the heating in the corridors did not function. It was snowing outside; there was a chorus of coughs and sneezes.

I tried to remember what were Nuremberg's associations for me. First of all spice-cakes: when we were living at the Khamovniki brewery, someone had sent my father from Nuremberg some beautiful round spice-cakes sprinkled with sparkling coloured sugar and

almonds. In my young days I had visited Nuremberg; I had no money and once a day ate two sausages with mashed potatoes but this did not prevent me sightseeing from morning till night. Dürer's precision and harshness frightened me but I schooled myself to stand gazing for hours on end, and even read his book. The tourists were shown the old towers and the 'Iron Maiden', the keeper conscientiously described the tortures and executions. At the time I was much taken with the Symbolists and memorized Sologub's lines: 'But in my youth I rejected the path of strict learning and came to Nuremberg by a free road. Who knows how much tedium there is in the art of the executioner, better never to handle the heavy sword'. Twenty-five years passed. I was sitting in a small Paris cinema. On all sides couples were busily kissing. A sentimental film was followed by a newsreel. A parade in Nuremberg. Columns marched, goose-stepping; the swastika spider crawled in the wind; the Führer gesticulated convulsively. It made me sick and I left the cinema. And now here I was once again in Nuremberg.

Yes, I was at that apotheosis of justice of which I had dreamt in the summer of 1942. I scrutinized the prisoners in the dock avidly, as if I should find the key here to the tragedy that had taken place. Goering was smiling at a pretty stenographer; Hess was reading a book; Streicher munched sandwiches. And all the while documents were being read: in the torture chambers three hundred thousand had been killed, six hundred thousand, six million.

From the way Goering's clothes hung on him it was clear that he had lost weight, and yet he still looked obese; there was something womanish about his face, and the earphones he wore seemed like a head-scarf. He wrote a lot and kept sending notes to his defence counsel. Suddenly he gazed attentively in my direction and whispered to his neighbours. They all stared at me. I thought something must be happening behind me and turned round, but the Kukryniksi were sitting there sketching as usual. Later one of the guards told me that Goering had recognized me; it seems they had been scrutinizing me as closely as I scrutinized them.

The only unexpected episode occurred in connection with the man whom the Nazis had called 'the conscience of the party', Hess. At the beginning of the trial he had claimed he could remember nothing. His counsel insisted that the defendant was suffering from amnesia; a whole session was taken up by evidence from the psychiatrists. Then

one day Hess asked permission to speak and declared he had feigned amnesia for tactical reasons. It was a farcical situation. However, all the sessions remain in my memory as one long nightmare.

When the film of the death camps was being shown, Schacht turned his back to the screen – he did not want to look; the others watched, but Frank wept and wiped his face with his handkerchief. It may sound incredible, but I saw it with my own eyes: Frank, Hans Frank who had written that when he arrived in Poland there had been three and a half million Jews and now there were only one hundred thousand left, this Frank sobbed when he saw on the screen what he had witnessed in real life over and over again. Or was he weeping for himself, realizing what was in store for him?

The accusers spoke of terrible crimes. The plans for attacking countries were designated under various names: the annexation of Austria was 'Plan Otto', the seizure of Czechoslovakia was 'Plan Green', that of Yugoslavia 'Aktion Marita', the annihilation of Poland was 'Operation Himmler', the planned attack on Gibraltar was 'Operation Felix', the invasion of the Soviet Union was 'Operation Barbarossa'. Some fifty million killed – and twenty ordinary criminals. No, one's mind refused to grasp it.

Let me return once again to their personalities. Ribbentrop, who was thin and bald, said that, as he suffered from insomnia, he took a lot of sleeping tablets and his memory was affected, but he had been mainly concerned with diplomacy: he had signed pacts and engaged in negotiations. He had the air of a respectable elderly bourgeois. Field Marshal Keitel made the impression of a bluff soldier, such as I had often met; to all questions he replied like a private of the Wehrmacht: 'I carried out orders', and when they read out his own order to brand Soviet prisoners of war, he shrugged his shoulders: 'It's an unfortunate misunderstanding'. Frank, the man who had acted with such savage brutality in Poland and wept when he saw Auschwitz on the screen, answered questions readily, throwing all the responsibility on Himmler and saying that he had dealt exclusively with the 'transfer of population': 'I was no more than an administrative underling'. I watched him closely when his report on the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto was read out. He had reported that all clothing had been collected and that the collection of scrap metal could now proceed; the sewers in which the survivors had taken refuge had been flooded. He listened to his own words blinking his eyes in astonishment. When the prosecutor

referred to his stealing a Leonardo da Vinci, he said: 'I find it difficult to say precisely what the price of this object was – I am no expert and, besides, prices changed in accordance with the value of the mark'. It was Alfred Rosenberg who regarded himself as an expert: he collected rare Russian books; he was a scholar, the theoretician of the Nazi party. At the same time he carried out various administrative assignments, pumping goods out of the Soviet Union and not disdaining quite small trifles; thus he issued the order that 'three or four hours before the operation' (as mass murder was called) 'the gold teeth of the Jews should be drawn'.

The appalling figures would suddenly be interrupted by petty details. The prosecutor was speaking about works of art stolen in various countries. Goering had amassed an excellent collection of Old Masters. I do not remember how it arose but there was a reference to the way in which he had haggled over the price of a dinner-service which, on this occasion, he was buying, not stealing. Well, yes, he did possess a beautiful dinner-service, he loved beautiful things altogether. When he enumerated his titles, he did not forget to mention that he was both head of the Forestry Department and president of the Hunt Association.

Von Neurath, the murderer of the Czechs, explained: 'Events caught me unawares. Hitler summoned me and said: "You are a man of the times, that is, a man with a cool head. You'll master the Czechs"'. Streicher's speciality was the Jews. His appearance was that of any old crotchety man in the street. Twenty years previously, here in Nuremberg, he had been tried for raping a little girl, but he had wriggled his way out: 'the sins of youth'. When questioned about the number of Jews killed he was amazed: 'I've always been a warm supporter of Theodor Herzl; it was my view that Palestine should be handed over to the Jews'.

The whole gang exuded fear. It is one thing to kill a million people – that is a programme, administrative zeal, party discipline, the excitement of the game – it is quite another to feel that in a month or in six months you yourself will be killed: you, Hermann, Julius, Rudolf, Alfred. Some of them tried to contest the legal procedure; Seyss-Inquart, who had crucified Holland, had studied law in his time and now he suddenly remembered the principles of jurisprudence. Others sought to please the judges by a show of feeling, or at least by a display of courtesy, by being circumstantial in their evidence; others

again laid everything at the door of their fellows in the dock; all of them jointly putting the whole responsibility on Hitler. He was not present at Nuremberg, of course, but perhaps if he had not done away with himself in a moment of frenzy, he, too, would have laid the blame on someone else, asserting that he had worked for the good of Germany and of all Europe, but that his ideas had been distorted, that much had been concealed from him and he had been duped himself.

'You are a man of the times, that is, a man with a cool head,' Hitler had said to von Neurath. These words, I think, explain a great deal. At the long sessions of the tribunal such matters were brought up as the gas-chambers; what German administrators were to have done in Baku after the capture of that city; the Admiralty's utilization of women's hair supplied by Auschwitz. Everything was entirely 'of the times': the seizure of other countries, the plan for the destruction of Leningrad, the execution of French hostages, Babiy Yar: a business undertaking, as it were, a gigantic trust.

One day I was talking to Vsevolod Ivanov in the icy corridor. I did not know him well at the time; we had seldom met. He was a man with many involved ideas and fancies but with a straight and true moral sense. 'How can one possibly understand it?' he asked in bewilderment. I said I did not know. It was easy for the judges to sort things out because they had direct evidence of the crimes. But we, writers, were trying to understand something rather different, namely, how had these men become what they were, capable of committing the deeds that had been brought out at the trial, and how could other people have carried out unquestioningly their orders? We tried to understand it and failed.

I remembered attending the trial in Poltava of ignorant peasants driven to despair; I remembered 'Bluebeard' Landru and the madman Gorgulov: in all these cases one was confronted by distortions of human personality, but here in Nuremberg it was the straightforward book-keeping of butchery and nothing more nor less. As I glanced at the dock the thought suddenly came to me that had these men been in a restaurant, celebrating the silver wedding of the commercial traveller Ribbentrop, or the long-service jubilee of the Bavarian government official Frick, no one would have so much as noticed them. This was where the world of Dostoyevsky ended and that of the Robot began.

I spent the best part of one night talking to the French journalist

Andrée Viollis, an intelligent and high-principled woman. (She had been one of the first to write about the brutality of the colonialists in Indo-China.) She described the distress of France, which had been not only ruined but spiritually crippled. We were sitting in the lounge for the rooms were cold; a noisy jazz-band was playing. 'What went wrong with mankind?' I asked. 'After all, Hitler had shown what he was capable of long before the war, and yet they parleyed with him, pretended not to notice.' And Andrée Viollis replied: 'It's something I've often thought about, even before the war. While Langevin knows much more than Aristotle did, I feel that Frank's intellectual make-up is no different from that of the most ruthless satrap of the past. Only Frank had better facilities, because the satrap had nothing like gas-chambers'.

The trial lasted a long time: all of ten months; but the journalists began to disperse long before the end. The outcome was known even in advance of the trial. Out of the twenty-one accused ten escaped with their lives, but this, too, I imagine, was of interest to only a small circle. I cannot conceal the fact that for me horror was mixed with boredom owing to the disproportion between the crimes and the criminals.

More than once, as I sat in the Nuremberg court, I thought: how frightening this is. After all, the whole world knew. Take Goering now. What was he? A vulgar sensualist, a careerist, a dishonest dealer, a nonentity, and at the same time one of the chief accomplices in the murder of fifty million people. This thought still comes to me today and still I cannot grasp it. In an earlier volume I wrote about Modigliani. He was not only a great painter but an outstanding personality. Yet who knew about him during his lifetime? Possibly a hundred eccentric frequenters of the Rotonde. Here were the murderers of Desnos. Were they capable of understanding his poetry, his love, his ideas? How had it come about that the attention of the whole world was focused on these vulgarians gone mad: 'Hitler said ...' 'Goering doesn't agree ...' 'Ribbentrop suggests ...' On Hitler's whim had hung the work of Einstein, the life of Soutine, of Vančura, of Max Jacob, of Saint-Pol-Roux, the frescoes of Novgorod and Pisa. This shame attaches not only to Hitler's countrymen but to all his contemporaries.

In the lounge of the Grand Hotel an American journalist (I have forgotten his name) said to me: 'Sure, Hitler was an evil man but you can't deny he was an evil man of genius. He made a great, highly cul-

tured nation dance to his tune, he deluded half of Europe. He was a foul ratcatcher with a magic pipe, a genius in evil'. I could not then and cannot today agree with him. It is not so much a matter of the assessment of Hitler's capacities, but of something else. Pascal said that had Cleopatra, who captivated both Caesar and Antony, had a shorter nose, the whole history of the world would have been different. I do not accept that either. I simply cannot believe that the destinies of millions of people could depend on an aquiline nose or on the adder's tongue of one human being. Social conditions play a tremendous part of course, but how can one interpret the events that were disclosed at Nuremberg solely in terms of economic crisis or rivalry between imperialist powers? Our contemporaries know exactly in what orbit a sputnik launched into space will move. But we do not yet know in what orbits human emotions and actions circle.

I was pondering over this in the jeep as I drove home through dozens of shattered German towns, through the ashes of Berlin. There was a time when such words as 'conscience', 'good', 'love of humanity' were in favour. My childhood and early youth were spent in an epoch when such words were common currency to the point of inflation. Later they fell into disuse altogether, just as candlesticks passed out of everyday life and into the collections of antique-fanciers. Those words often concealed dishonest, inhuman, wicked actions, yet at times they served as brakes. Pushkin said: 'And for a long time I shall be loved by the people because with my lyre I awakened kind feelings, and because in my cruel century I glorified freedom and called for compassion towards the fallen'.

I recalled an article by Marina Tsvetayeva, the story of d'Anthès. At first he had felt no regret: he had killed a Russian courtier in a duel, and that was all there was to it. But with the years the fame of the murdered poet grew, and d'Anthès began to justify himself. It was neither the Tsar nor d'Anthès who emerged as victor; the victor was Pushkin because he was a poet of genius and because he had awakened kind feelings, had glorified freedom and had demanded compassion for the fallen.

Flaxen-haired schoolboys in tattered little sheepskin coats were walking along the streets of ruined Orsha in lively discussion. As I watched them my heart felt somehow more at peace.

4

I GOT back to Moscow at the end of December, and gaily saw the New Year in with friends. But the war would not let go of me; I wrote about it, I thought about it, yet I realized that it was time to get back into the groove of peacetime life. We had many visitors. I talked painting with Falk and Konchalovsky, made friends with Obratsov and went to his puppet-theatre. Gekhman, a *Red Star* war-correspondent, invited me to his wedding; there was quite a crowd, we had dinner, drank wine and talked very loudly, while Gekhman's face was bright with happiness. Konchalovsky's seventieth birthday was celebrated with great splendour; he danced with some young Spanish girls, friends of his daughter-in-law. On 22nd February, the anniversary of Alexey Tolstoy's death, his widow invited us to Barvikha; everything there reminded one of him; even grief was warm and alive.

Ciné-News persuaded me to write the script for documentary films on Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. This took up a lot of time. I frequently gave talks on the Balkans and the Nuremberg trial at the Polytechnical Institute, in factories and to army men.

One day I went to the Jewish Theatre to see the play *Freilachs*. It was a lively performance, based on the folklore of small provincial towns. The costumes had been designed by my friend Tyshler. Mikhoëls produced the play and Zuskin acted superbly. I laughed with everybody else but suddenly fear gripped me; I remembered the ditches and pits where now the characters of *Freilachs* lay, murdered by the Nazis. Mikhoëls and Zuskin took curtain calls in response to the applause. How could anyone have imagined that shortly one of them was to be killed in a deserted spot on the outskirts of Minsk, and the other shot?

The Jewish poet Abraham Sutzkever came to see me. (I had not met him during the war. He had been in the Vilnius ghetto, had made his escape and joined the partisans, and was later brought out to the 'Big Land'¹.) He told me that he had been at Nuremberg to give evi-

¹ This is what the partisans called unoccupied territory.

dence. Boris Polevoy wrote in *Pravda* that Sutzkever's account of the tragedy of the Vilnius ghetto, where the poet's family perished with the rest, made a deep impression on the judges.

As before, I went on meeting foreigners. I find notes in my diary: lunch with the French ambassador Catroux, dinner with the Norwegian ambassador Andvord, and so on. When I got back to Moscow in the autumn I did not immediately realize that everything had changed. It brings to mind a grotesque and sad episode. The Colombian chargé d'affaires, a man of letters, arrived in Moscow and wanted to meet Soviet writers and artists. He took a large room at the Hotel National where a table was laid for the thirty people he had invited for dinner. But only three turned up: F. Kelyin, the Spanish author Arconada and myself. The diplomat was uneasy and kept looking towards the door. At about ten o'clock the waiters began to clear the table. Our host's voice shook with vexation. We did our best to console him, raised our glasses and drank to friendship, but the long empty table depressed us all.

In March Churchill's Fulton speech was published, and for the first time I read the words 'iron curtain'. Churchill offered the Americans a military alliance against the Soviet Union. This sounded like a paradox: the press was still carrying reports of the Nuremberg trial where the British and American prosecutors, together with their Soviet colleagues, had indicted Goering and Keitel. I do not know which was the more bitter: to recall the past or to think about the future.

I delivered two small books to the publishing house The Soviet Writer: one of travel sketches, *European Crossroads*, and the other a book of poems called *The Tree*. The fate of books was as uncertain as that of men. The travel book met with no objections, and anyhow the sketches had already appeared in *Pravda* or *Izvestia*. (Two years later the book was banned from the libraries because it contained a chapter on Yugoslavia.) But the poems worried the publishers: 'Too pessimistic'. (Even in 1959 the publisher was not happy about some of the poems in *The Tree*, which were included in a volume of collected verse: 'Better cut that out or at least change this word, it's too gloomy'.) *The Tree* appeared in July 1946. Fadeyev told me afterwards that it was to have been cited in one of the devastating articles of general criticism, but I happened to be abroad at the time and was left in peace. In short, *The Tree* was lucky.

In January the Writers' Union presented medals 'for valorous

work', and Boris Pasternak was among those decorated; he told me that he was shortly to give a literary evening at the Polytechnical Institute. In Leningrad Mikhail Zoshchenko spoke on behalf of the writers who had been awarded medals. At the beginning of April Leningrad poets held an important gathering in the Hall of Columns. Among others Anna Akhmatova recited her poems and was enthusiastically received. Two days later she came to see me and when I mentioned the readings, she shook her head: 'I don't much care for that sort of thing. And what's more, it's not approved of'.

I tried to reassure her: this was not nineteen thirty-seven. Although I had reached the age of fifty-five not long before I still could not rid myself of simple-minded logic.

In the early days of January I began *The Storm* and became engrossed in it. The book had been in my thoughts for a long time but I had not been able to bring myself to write the first chapter. Now I wrote without a break and before April had completed a third of the novel – the first two parts. They still seem to me the best in the book, for they describe the eve of the war and I was writing about something which I had lived through and felt deeply. All the romanticism which had accumulated in me found expression as I wrote about Sergey and Mado, about the light of doomed love. In the story of the meeting of the two brothers – the honest dogmatist Osip and the light-hearted Frenchman Léon – there was also a good deal of the writer's emotional experience.

I tried to illustrate, if only obliquely, the injustices of the pre-war years in the incident of the student Zina, expelled from the Komsomol for refusing to blacken her father who had been arrested.

While the novel was in the press several sentences were cut; some passages lost their colour, others became incomprehensible. Here are a few examples taken from the first part. (I happen to have kept the original manuscript.) About Sergey's arrival in Paris, I wrote: 'He came from the Moscow of the hard, creaking years . . .' and the word 'creaking' was deleted. Léon says to Osip: 'You even live for the future'. After that came: 'It's like greyhounds chasing an electric hare: the hare can't be caught, and it is released so that the dogs should run faster' – this was deleted. In the story about Zina the printed version says: 'You know, of course, she's in trouble on account of her father', omitting the sentence: 'when he was arrested, it was winter'. So the

'trouble' that is meant remains unexplained. But perhaps these are enough examples of 'misprints'.

I wrote from early morning till night. Then one day at the beginning of April I was summoned to the Central Committee and told that I must go to America with General Galaktionov and the writer Simonov to a conference of newspaper editors. I told Molotov that I had begun writing a novel some of the action of which was laid in France and that on my way back from America I should like to spend some time in that country. He said he had no objections.

I must break the continuity of the narrative here in order to complete the tale of *The Storm*. I shall be speaking about America and France in later chapters, but here let me recall the events of that summer of 1946 which are connected with my work as a writer.

It happened at the end of August, in the small French town of Vouvray, near Tours. In the morning Lyuba and I drove to La Bachellerie where Anatole France had lived for a long time; we were driven there by the author's grandson, Lucien Psychari. The house was a reflection both of France's novels and of his personality: I remembered the bibliophile at the bookstalls on the quays of the Seine. The Tanagra figures did not strike me as museum pieces but seemed part and parcel of the domestic interior. We drank a fragrant Vouvray in the writer's dining-room. Later on, back at the little old hotel where we were staying, I had a nap. Lyuba woke me up; she had read a tiny paragraph in a Paris paper: 'News comes from Moscow of a new purge of which the writers Anna Akhmatova and Zoshchenko are the victims'.

The first thing I did when we got to Paris was to rush to the embassy and ask for the Soviet papers. And then, in October when we returned to Moscow, I learnt the details: after Zhdanov's report Anna Akhmatova and Zoshchenko had been expelled from the Writers' Union.

I had believed that, after the Soviet people's victory, the thirties could not repeat themselves, yet everything reminded me of the way things had gone in those days: writers, film-directors and composers were called together, 'abettors' were singled out, and every day new names swelled the list of those censured. Accusations were levelled against Pasternak and Shostakovich, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Kozintsev and Trauberg, Pogodin and Selvinsky, Kirsanov and Grossman, Eichenbaum and Bergholtz, Timofeyev and Sadofyev, Mezhirov and Gladkov.

The journal *Kultura i Zhizn* (Culture and Life) began to appear with articles which read more like indictments. The sharpest attacks were levelled against Zoshchenko and Akhmatova. In Zhdanov's report and in newspaper articles the campaign against 'obsequiousness to the West' was launched.

I remembered Zhdanov from the First Writers' Congress. Stalin evidently regarded him as an expert on art and letters and as early as 1934 had given him the task of speaking at the Congress. I met him again in 1947. He invited five or six writers, including myself, to join the editorial board of the magazine *Znanya* (The Banner). I refused point blank and sat in silence throughout the meeting, while Zhdanov explained what the nature of Soviet literature should be. Early in 1948 Prokofiev and Shostakovich told me that Zhdanov had also invited the composers to meet him and told them that the most important element in music was a melody that could be hummed. While I was in Warsaw I remember being woken up in the night by the telephone bell. It was Fadeyev who said: 'Terrible news – Zhdanov is dead. I'll be waiting for you downstairs'.

I had seldom met Zoshchenko, we had somehow never got to know each other well though I always considered him one of our best writers. Much later, in the early fifties, I ran across him in the Pushkin boulevard; he was depressed and looked ill. Friends told me that he was taking things hard. Anna Akhmatova I saw in 1947. She was sitting in a small room where her portrait by Modigliani hung on the wall and, sad and majestic as ever, was reading Horace. Misfortunes crashed down on her like avalanches; it needed more than common fortitude to preserve such dignity, composure and pride – in the best sense of that word. In 1965 justice triumphed, if belatedly: Anna Akhmatova was invited to Italy, where she received an international prize, and to Oxford, to be awarded an honorary D.Litt.

I have described the events of the summer of 1946 in order to make clear the circumstances in which *The Storm* was written. I got back to the novel in October that year, and at once the scenes of America, the meetings in Paris, the disquieting crackle of the radio retreated into the background, while visions of the war closed in on me and I lived with my characters. There is, in my view, a good deal in *The Storm* that has not come off, probably because the events described were too recent and I had not had time to digest them. All the same, there are some characters in the book – Mado, her father Lancier, the painter

Sembat, the scholar Dumas, Dr Krylov, the sad romantic Minayev and his Mamulya – whom I cherish. I finished the novel in June 1947.

It provoked a lot of discussion. Some readers were angry: why were the French shown as more heroic than the Soviet people? The explanation may be that the exploits of partisans always appear in a romantic light, whereas in our country it was the whole people, not individual heroes, who fought the Germans. Or perhaps some readers were influenced by articles in the press, for the ferocious campaign against 'obsequiousness to the West' was then at its height. Here are a few excerpts from a review of *The Storm*: '... Our people are not as helpless and as pitiful as Ilya Ehrenburg makes out ... It is simply that the liberal bourgeois do not understand and therefore calumniate the Soviet régime. They see in our country only people like Alper and Labazov, the dilettante Vlachov and provincial public servants like Krylov, that is, they see only what it suits them to see ... But Comrade Ehrenburg is not a liberal bourgeois ... Yet in all the confrontations of Soviet men with those of capitalist France, the French always have the advantage and the Russians come out second best ... One may ask, is Sergey Vlachov a Russian? And is the Soviet Union his fatherland?'

Critics of this sort were infuriated by the description of the first months of the war although, like the whole Soviet people, they knew perfectly well what had happened in 1941. One critic wrote: 'Everything has been explained by Comrade Stalin'. Meanwhile Stalin had not, of course, explained why just before the war he had exterminated the leading military cadres and why, having always been exceedingly suspicious, he had taken Hitler's word on trust.

The novel was coming out in *Novy Mir* (New World) of which Konstantin Simonov was the editor at the time. 'No trouble so far, I think all is going smoothly,' he wrote to me. I expected to be let off with a few broadsides from the more fanatical denouncers of 'obsequiousness to the West'.

What actually happened went far beyond my expectations. In 1948 I wrote down this account given me by Fadeyev who, as chairman of the committee which awarded the Stalin Prizes, reported to the Politburo on the proposed candidates: 'Stalin asked why *The Storm* had been put forward to receive only a second prize. I explained that in the committee's opinion the novel suffered from certain defects. For instance, one of the main characters, a Soviet citizen, falls in love

with a Frenchwoman. This was not typical. Then there were no real heroes. Stalin retorted: "But I like this Frenchwoman, she's a nice girl. And besides, such things do happen in real life. As regards heroes, I think that few people are born heroes, it's ordinary people who become heroes". Fadeyev added: 'You won't be surprised to hear that I didn't try to argue', and he burst into loud laughter.

The more I think about Stalin, the more fully it is borne in on me how little I understand. At the same Politburo meeting he defended Vera Panova's novel *The Factory* against the committee and slyly asked Fadeyev: 'And do *you* know how to resolve all conflicts? I don't'. Stalin defended Sergey's right to love Mado, but shortly after was dictating the law prohibiting marriage between Soviet citizens and foreigners, even if they were subjects of Socialist countries. This law caused many tragedies. I remember a demobilized officer, a good and honest fellow, who haunted me, showing me letters from his girl, a Pole, in which she said her neighbours jeered at her and she implored him to get permission for them to marry. I wrote, I petitioned, but in vain. Stalin's deeds so often contradicted his words that I ask myself whether by any chance my novel could have given him the idea of promulgating this inhuman decree. He had said 'such things do happen', had thought it over and come to the conclusion that they ought not to.

Of the books published between the years 1946 and 1954 I believe that those about the war will live not only because men fought for the Soviet land without being inwardly torn in two, without any compulsory adulation, but also because the heroes of the war years had a right to suffering and death. Whereas in describing times of peace the writer knew that the choice of 'admissible' conflicts was limited to natural calamities, espionage and the backwardness of some stupid organizer.

When I had finished *The Storm* I did not plan another novel for a long time, but wrote articles and did translations. It was not easy for a writer to work in those years. A great deal has been written in our country about the harmful effects of the 'personality cult' on agriculture, on industry, on building and so forth; it remains for me, a writer, to add that it did not exactly facilitate the flowering of literature. Not so long ago Paustovsky has had something to say about this.

What sustained me at the time? I wrote about this later, when speaking of the children of the fabled 'South': 'But how could they possibly

guess, even briefly, even for a minute, even in their sleep, by accident, what it meant to think about the spring, what it meant during the chill of March, when despair grips one, to wait and wait for the heavy ice clumsily to start to move. But we knew such winters, we became inured to such chill so that there was not even sorrow, only pride and trouble. And in the hard icy pain, blinded by the dry snow-storm, we saw, without seeing, the green eyes of the spring'.

And *The Storm* remains for me a faint muted echo of the grim but clean years.

5

I LEFT Moscow by air with General Galaktionov. Simonov had been summoned from Japan and was to catch up with us in Paris. We reached Smolensk but had to turn back because of engine trouble, so that we reached Berlin only towards evening and were forced to spend the night there. On the next day we were told that we were going to Paris on the same plane as Lieutenant-General Bedell Smith, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union: the cold war had not yet become a way of life.

We flew over Germany. From above towns usually look like Cubist pictures, but bombing had interfered with the composition, and Magdeburg was more like a Tachiste painting – all disorderly brush-strokes. Galaktionov was panting with heat in his general's uniform and very nervous: 'The journalists'll pounce on us at once. It's all very well for you, you're used to it, but I've never talked to foreigners before'.

At Orly airport we were met by Americans, by members of our embassy, by Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet. It was a sunny spring day; the chestnut-trees were in bloom; we drove past places with which I was very familiar: the workers' quarter of Italie, the Lion de Belfort. And here was Montparnasse: on this corner I had spent my youth. I felt like indulging in a little melancholy but did not have the time. The Aragons carried me off to lunch, then the Moussinacs came; I listened avidly to their stories about the years of occupation, about the Resistance, about common friends.

Rooms had been booked for us in an hotel near the Etoile. American officers were quartered there. Everything was alien to me: this part of the town, the rowdy officers, the American food. I went out to stroll round Paris and to see my elder sisters who had got stranded in France. They told me how they had hidden from the Germans, how friends had helped them. Fotinsky arrived full of excitement and in great haste to tell me that he was going to Moscow, he was no longer afraid of being prevented, the Russians had won the war, they had saved the world. In Montparnasse I met Zadkine and Larionov. Laughter-loving Dusya was the same as ever, although much of what she, like every-

body else, had gone through was far from funny. We talked, recalling the past; the pre-war years seemed like ancient history. Someone said: 'Was it really only six years ago?'

Simonov arrived by air. I decided to give my friends a real French dinner and went to see Joséphine. Before the war she had kept a restaurant in the rue du Cherche-Midi which I described in *The Fall of Paris*. She was glad to see me again. 'I've been told you've written something about me,' she said. 'I've often wondered how things were with you in Russia.' When I mentioned my plans to her she said in dismay: 'My poor Monsieur Ehrenburg, you don't know what it's like now. There's absolutely nothing to be had'. Nevertheless she produced a wonderful dinner. Galaktionov greatly appreciated the *coq au vin*, but avoided looking at the oysters, and when Joséphine brought in a selection of cheeses, he said: 'I think I'll go for a walk and come back in a quarter of an hour'. Simonov enjoyed everything and lit a havana which he had brought with him from Japan.

The Soviet ambassador Bogomolov arranged a press conference at which I had to speak about the war, reconstruction, and the Soviet people's attitude towards France. A great many people came, most of whom I knew, including Aragon, Elsa Triolet, André Chamson, Charles Vildrac, Jean Cassou, Stanislas Fumet, Jean Paulhan, René Black, Marcel Cachin and Emile Buré.

We were due to leave on the 27th but were turned back at the airport; it was raining hard and the flight had been cancelled. I was delighted: it meant an extra day in Paris. The general was worried because tomorrow was the opening day of the conference and we should be late.

I went to Marquet's and looked for a long time at his landscapes: this is what I had been missing – grey water on canvas, a little real art.

We flew out the next day. Civil aviation was still in its infancy and we touched down twice on the journey. Northern Ireland looked very green; we were given lunch and I kept the reporters away from the general. Then we flew over the ocean. It proved no more disturbing to fly over water than over dry land, and I dozed off. In Newfoundland everything was covered with snow; we were given breakfast. At neighbouring tables the local inhabitants drank beer and yawned; I looked at the restaurant clock: midnight by local time. After the European night a second one awaited us – the American night.

As it grew light I saw a large city: Boston. Skyscrapers were straining towards the plane; I realized that we had indeed crossed the ocean.

Before landing we were given forms to fill in. As well as the usual questions there was one about race. I filled in the forms for all three of us (Galaktionov could speak a little French and Simonov could only exclaim in English 'Wonderful!' and 'I love America'). Instead of replying to the question about race I put a dash. My anti-racism cost us an extra hour in the small passport control building. A member of our embassy told us that the police officer rang up his chiefs: 'The Reds won't state whether they're white or coloured'.

We travelled to Washington by train. I was quite stupid with fatigue but was obliged to go straight to the conference. There were about three hundred people in the hall, proprietors and editors of various newspapers; each wore a badge with his name and that of his paper. Galaktionov represented *Pravda*, Simonov *Red Star* and I *Izvestia*. During the interval the proprietor of a provincial newspaper asked me: 'Is your paper leased to you on a concession from the government or do you work on a yearly salary?' We made our speeches and then answered questions. One editor said that he had lived in Moscow in the thirties and that things had been much easier then for foreign correspondents who could travel anywhere they liked except to Central Asia, and that censorship had been moderate; but now movement was restricted and there was harsh censorship. It fell to me to answer this and I blamed everything on the war, adding that I was a journalist, not a censor. Another editor expressed his indignation at the long delays in granting visas. The general remained silent, and I again had to find a way out. 'I don't grant visas,' I said. 'I'd give them to everybody; I believe that the more journalists travel the better. Perhaps that's why I'm not put in charge of issuing visas.' The Americans laughed and the ice was broken. Galaktionov replied to a question on disarmament. Suddenly a fat journalist with a large cigar (exactly like a poster caricature of a capitalist) stood up and addressed the general: 'I'd like to know, could your paper publish a demand for the resignation of Premier Stalin and his replacement by, say, Molotov or Litvinov?' Galaktionov turned towards me and I read horror on his face: 'Go on, reply, you're used to this sort of thing'. I said as calmly as I could: 'No, that's out of the question. I ought perhaps to remind our colleagues that different countries have different régimes and a

different order of things'. The Americans liked the candour of my reply and the next morning I read in the papers that I was 'a mixture of cynicism and frankness'. Before the banquet we went to the hotel. Galaktionov said several times: 'Ghastly experience'.

The hotel was ultra modern. When I got back to my room that night, utterly exhausted, I tried to open the window but could not; I pressed various buttons: cold air streamed in, lights went out, the radio blared, but the window would not open. Finally I went to bed quite worn out, and in the morning rushed to the window again accusing myself of technical backwardness and general incompetence. I did not dare to ring for the maid and ask her for fear that the hotel people should think what savages these Russians were. One of the embassy secretaries found me still at the window in my pyjamas. 'It's time to be going to the meeting.' 'No,' I said. 'Just you open the window first.' He tried, then rang for the maid who explained with a smile: 'The window doesn't open, there's dust outside, clean air is piped in'. The secretary liked this: 'Their technical organization is wonderful'. But I felt unhappy: you could not even open a window, that was what the new century was going to be like.

I soon realized that an old European cannot feel at ease in the New World. Enjoying the unaccustomed comfort, and because his war novel was a best-seller and he was thirty years old, Simonov had a good time. How things went for Galaktionov I shall relate in due course. As for myself, I was afraid of appearing an old curmudgeon. I observed things, I met hundreds of people, I travelled about. In one of my articles I said: 'America has come to occupy an important place in the life of the human race and one cannot understand our century without having understood America. There have been hundreds of odes and hundreds of lampoons written about her: it is easy to extol or to ridicule her, it is more difficult to understand her. Technical complexity sometimes conceals simplicity of heart, and behind this simplicity there may yet be true human complexity'.

I succeeded in making friends with several Americans, yet I must confess that I found it restful to be with Europeans, whether old friends like Julian Tuwim, Chagall, Stefa, Cherassi, Roman Jakobson, or people I had come across before, like Le Corbusier, de la Poype, or those whom I was now meeting for the first time, such as Einstein, Koussevitzky, Sholem Asch and Oscar Lange. And when in New Orleans I saw old European houses with balconies, I smiled happily.

In the USA I began for the first time to doubt the unquestionable validity of traditions, of accepted values and tastes. Eight years later I went to China and then visited Latin America, India and Japan. I was aware by then how varied the world is and I applied less frequently the European measuring-rod, whether metre or *arshin*. But the visit to the USA was my first sally or, if you like, my elementary school. For that reason I shall have more to say about it and in greater detail than I have written of my other travels.

6

IN THE past when I saw torrents of rain in American films I took them for the director's stage effects. But I discovered that rain in America is quite unlike rain in Europe; everything there is on an extravagant scale: the heat, the hurricanes, the floods. The fruits and berries are enormous and very beautiful, but they have neither the aroma nor the flavour to which we are accustomed. The former Vice-President of the USA, Henry Wallace, had brought back from the Soviet Union some plants of 'Russian strawberries' (*Fragaria moschata*); the berries are nothing much to look at – small and green-tipped – but extraordinarily fragrant. He was an enthusiastic gardener, and in this we found a common passion apart from politics. He took me into his kitchen-garden, but I did not recognize my little countrywoman: the berries were three times larger than at home but the savour had gone.

I well remember my first night in New York. The hotels were overcrowded and the consul had taken a room for me on the eighteenth floor in a narrow street off Broadway. I could not sleep: drunks were yelling near by and the reflected neon lights of advertisements flickered about the room. I spent half the night at the window; the sky over Broadway blazed, the peaks of the skyscrapers loomed and jazz thundered, while down below, as in a mountain gorge, flocks of human beings thronged. It was beautiful and unbearable.

I was lunching one day with Le Corbusier in a small French restaurant on 42nd Street. He asked about the war, about the fate of our towns, and talked of architecture. He is an unusual kind of person. On that occasion he said with a little laugh: 'I'll be sixty quite soon and I've built almost nothing, they won't let me. I'm a man of defeats'. Like all innovators, Le Corbusier created essences whereas people look for the kind of art in which the essence has been diluted. Today Le Corbusier's ideas have triumphed everywhere, and so have the architects who studied under him, who imitated him but who at the same time have a commercial approach while Le Corbusier himself thought only about the style of his age and not at all about the customers. He produced buildings that were manifestos: in Marseilles and

Rio de Janeiro, in Lyons and Bogota, in New York and in the Punjab, he built huge skyscrapers and groups of small houses; he battled with streets, defended trees and human nerves, demanded freedom for the sun. He is seventy-five now and has lived to enjoy recognition¹. At our first meeting in America I told him that I was full of admiration for the architecture of New York but was also oppressed by it. 'You've always been romantic by nature,' he said. 'Even when you were defending Constructivism. D'you know what New York is? It's a catastrophic fairyland.'

There is always a great danger in forming an opinion of a person or a country whom or which you do not know well enough and then explaining everything on the basis of these preconceptions. I knew America from books by American writers, from friends' descriptions, I had seen in Europe what we call 'Americanization', and I had a conventional idea of the New World. Everything I had thought proved right and at the same time wrong: superficial on some matter, one-sided on another, and consequently unjust. It was true that everyone was in a perpetual hurry, but a closer look revealed that this was the *form* of their life rather than its content: there was no lack of muddle, of bureaucracy or of tangled human passions.

I was jostled in the street; journalists sat on my bed; men gesticulated not only with their hands but also with their feet; I knew that wherever I was invited someone would sit on the floor and a girl would take off her shoes; they swore; they slapped me familiarly on the back; they behaved without ceremony and, measured by my European yardstick, unceremoniously. I heard stories of careers quickly made, of competitors trampling on one another, of yesterday's millionaire reduced to pauperism and yesterday's pauper sweeping about in a Cadillac. All this arose less from special greed or innate rudeness than from the immaturity of the society.

In the course of my life I have more than once come across sons who toppled their fathers, and fathers appalled by the ingratitude, the bad manners and the ignorance of their children; this seems to be an everlasting situation. Many of America's qualities and defects are due to her age. How young they are, I used to think to myself, sometimes with a shade of tenderness and sometimes with irritation. Men from all over the world came to the fertile and sparsely populated spaces; and of

¹ Written before Le Corbusier's death on 27th August 1965.

course there also came desperadoes, exuberant failures, hopeful jobbers, incorrigible dreamers, those who are the first to break out of a theatre on fire and the last to leave a gambling den. To quote Sholem Aleichem: 'In America men do not live, they seek refuge'. The nation was created out of refugees: out of Englishmen, Italians, Jews, Irishmen, Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs, Germans, Scandinavians. Swiftly the amalgam came into being. People brought nothing with them but a change of underclothes and the will to live; as for their time-honoured traditions, these do not travel well. The immigrants started from scratch. In this way a nation was born that was destined in days to come to occupy the forefront of the world stage.

In New Orleans I was taken to an old tavern which the Americans treat as a museum piece. The building is barely a hundred years old. It was a hot day of that sultry humidity which exhausts Europeans, and the Americans, too, were drenched in sweat; they drank iced cocktails by a blazing hearth – an open fireplace – logs – something rare – deep antiquity – Pompeii.

The age of the country also accounts for the semi-nomadic existence of the population. After America Europe seemed to me like an over-used, unaired house. Americans are always on the move, and in this process people of no more than average means leave their furniture behind because it is cheaper to buy a new lot than to take it with them, and there is none of that European feeling that attaches to old family lumber. They move from one town to another, from one state to another.

I saw hardly any small cars; the workers had large ones that had been expensive when new but had done hundreds of thousands of miles. No work? A man bundles his family and his belongings into his car and drives off to try his luck elsewhere (in the thirties we used to call it 'going in search of the long rouble'). An American took me for a drive; when we wanted lunch he stopped in front of a restaurant and sounded his horn. Trays with meat, beer and coffee were brought out to us. We had to eat sitting in the car although we were in no hurry to get anywhere and were merely spinning along wonderful roads, past one-storeyed houses, all very much alike. I saw an enclosure: cars drove in, a film was being shown. At night many cars without lights can be seen in New York's Central Park. Friends told me that couples use cars instead of hotel bedrooms; from time to time the police would organize a round-up.

In department stores I saw men buying a new suit and throwing away the one they had been wearing. My old friend Gilmore, who accompanied me to the South, bought a shirt practically every day because he said this was easier than sending the dirty one to the wash.

It was not as though I had come to America from classical Greece, or even from Italy or Spain, yet I was struck by the astonishing degree of standardization. All the towns looked alike. I saw the same streets, the same houses, the same shop-signs, the same ties in Detroit and in Jackson. An article by a popular columnist was published simultaneously in fifty newspapers; the same gossip, anecdotes and sermons turned up everywhere.

Conclusions were forcing themselves on me and the classic figure of Babbitt seemed to emerge. Yet I did not jump to hasty conclusions and I told myself that it was all like this and yet not quite so.

The announcements of Sunday services amused me; they were like the inducements to patronize a sideshow at a fair: one church offered a coloured film on a biblical subject, another enticed the public with choice refreshments. This sort of advertising did not seem to strike the Americans as blasphemous. In Alabama we called on a professor and were asked to stay to lunch. When we were all seated at the table the professor rose and said an impromptu grace, asking the Lord for peace between two great nations. Judging by their faces the members of the household were genuinely praying. At another lunch, organized by the editor of the *New York Times*, a card lay beside each plate which I took for the menu, but it turned out to be an advertisement for the paper printed on one side with a prayer on the other. On that occasion no one prayed.

Soon after our arrival in America Simonov and I were invited to a dinner given by one of the Jewish organizations. Our consul told us that we ought to go as the organization had collected over two million dollars for children's homes in the Soviet Union. A great many people came, anxious to hear the 'Reds', as the papers called us. We dined on a dais while the other guests sat below at small tables. A professional fund collector (a Christian minister, not a rabbi) acted as *compère* and cleverly extracted the dollars. People forked out a hundred or two hundred dollars, some wrote cheques for a thousand, and these were warmly thanked by the clergyman while everyone else clapped. I had to speak but the whole thing rather nauseated me. In my speech I reminded those present that they owed a great debt to the Soviet people

and that when a tiny portion of a debt is being repaid it is not a matter for self-congratulation or applause. I also said that our people gave their lives more modestly than dollars were being given here. One of the organizers of the dinner-party brought me some tablets, evidently thinking that the acidity of my remarks was caused by a nervous upset.

Certainly Sinclair Lewis was not inventing things: in Birmingham I myself heard the compliment 'you look like a million dollars'. Of course, the cult of the dollar is very widespread. But I also met many disinterested idealists in America, such as the modest lawyer by the name of Farmer in Nashville. He sincerely believed in the idea of World Government. Later this idea was exploited by politicians for purposes far from humanitarian, but Farmer was persuaded that World Government would save the human race from war. He became a preacher. He took me to his father's farm and while we lunched there he tried to convert his father to his new faith. In New Orleans I met an engineer who before the war had designed a machine for cotton picking. He was offered a large sum for his patent but after a talk with an economist friend he destroyed his invention for fear of depriving tens of thousands of farmworkers of their living. I saw white campaigners in Mississippi who spoke against the oppression of Negroes, I was present at the first demonstration against the atom bomb. In the late forties the American Congregationalist minister John Darr worked for the peace movement. He wrote down conversations which seemed important to him: he wanted to understand all the finer points of the Marxist interpretation of events. A peace movement delegation was invited to China. There, too, the Reverend John Darr naturally took down all the wise and unwise pronouncements of those he talked to. Although the Chinese themselves carefully recorded what I and the other guests had to say, the American's predilection for taking notes aroused their suspicions and they sent a report on him to Moscow. This good and absolutely honest man, Darr, was to be given a wide berth. He realized this and returned to America where he continued to work for peace, although this created a good deal of unpleasantness for him. Today I am not surprised to hear about the campaign for disarmament that has spread in America. In the summer of 1965 many pacifist clerics, pastors, Quakers, advocates of universal disarmament, women outraged by the war in Vietnam, many courageous and disinterested Americans came to the Helsinki congress.

How could one understand all the contradictions? I racked my brains over this in 1946. In Paris the houses are all more or less of the same size, six or seven storeys high; in American provincial towns the houses are one-storeyed with a few skyscrapers in the centre. There are so many contrasts in America that it baffles you. Between the two World Wars we read and admired such American writers as Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Caldwell. When I came to America I realized that they stood alone, as it were, in a wilderness. In the state of Mississippi professional men had never even heard of Faulkner, although he lived quite close in the town of Oxford. I was struck by the absence of middlebrow literature: it was either Hemingway or a 'Digest', Faulkner or the imbecile 'comics'. I saw excellent films made by John Ford, William Wyler, Orson Welles and Rouben Mamoulian, while in the cinemas next door they were showing cheap comedies and savage melodramas, treacle and filth.

I had long wanted to attend a gathering of members of the Lion Club, which has branches in every town. It so happened that in the South, not far from the town where Faulkner lived, I was invited to a 'lions' lunch. The chairman rapped the table with a gavel and the members of the club, mainly businessmen, roared in chorus: 'O-o-o-o!' It was so ridiculous that I could hardly refrain from laughing. The lunch ended, the 'lions' went back to their offices, and I walked along Main Street thinking: that's all very well, but how did they manage to produce a Faulkner?

In New York I went to see John Steinbeck. In Paris, before the war, I had enjoyed his novel *Of Mice and Men*. He lived in a one-storeyed house in the centre of New York which was luxury indeed. Several of his novels had been filmed in Hollywood; he criticized these films, and much else, while drinking whisky 'on the rocks'. We sat in a large studio (Steinbeck's wife is a painter). He said to me: 'If you spit in a lion's mouth, you can tame him'. (I recalled these words later on many times; they apply to lions of different breeds.) Some years afterwards Steinbeck came to the Soviet Union. I went with him to Zagorsk; he was keen to see the craftsmen who carve wooden animals. Formerly they had done interesting work but, influenced by the trend towards naturalism, they had begun to turn out the required articles. When one of the craftsmen had carved the rough shape of a bear Steinbeck wanted to buy the unfinished toy. The man was indignant: 'D'you want people in America to laugh at us?' But Steinbeck assured him: 'This is

real art'. And he added: 'When you're writing a novel you must know when to stop'.

Fifteen years passed, and not so long ago I met Steinbeck again. In the interval he had written a great deal and had known both failure and fame. He sat in my room, looking large and strong, and I kept thinking how essentially American he was. It is a young country and its people do not grow old: they live at full strength and then they collapse. I am not sure whether Steinbeck knows any longer when to stop writing a novel, I did not try to ask him; there is probably no author in the world who knows himself, for novelists are preoccupied with their characters and have no time to reflect much on themselves. Of course he had become more subdued in some ways; I sensed in him the ponderousness and lenience of a man in his sixties, but he was still loud and unquenchable, like his country.

Today I understand the Americans rather better. But in 1946 I asked myself what was the mainspring of Steinbeck's life? And of America's? These were not idle questions asked out of a tourist's curiosity or an ethnographer's interest: I realized that a great deal had changed in the world since the war. All depended on what path this rich, highly civilized and yet half-savage country would take.

Hundreds of Americans have tried to prove to me that of all peoples the Americans enjoy the greatest freedom and that this is owing to private enterprise, to the pioneering mentality and the importance of the individual. The way they talked they might have been Spanish Anarchists and Truman a disciple of 'Miguel' Bakunin. Indeed, I have visited towns where private companies supplied not only the gas and electricity but even the water. On the roads our car was constantly stopped and we had to pay tolls because the road was the property of some businessman or planter; the bridge across the Mississippi is owned by a joint-stock company. In 1946 the government was making a drive against waste. Everywhere I saw advertisements: 'Do not forget that there are 500 million hungry human beings in the world. Heinz - 57 varieties'. I asked the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in the town of Jackson why the firm of Heinz advertised its tinned goods with the aid of humanitarian phrases. The chairman shook his head: 'That's not the point. Heinz are trying to help the government. People don't believe official statements but what Heinz say carries great weight'. At the same time the authorities think nothing of interfering in the private lives of citizens. In New York, in the hotel where I

stayed for a week, there was a police raid during the night; a newly married couple from out of town was arrested because they could not produce a marriage certificate. There were States where people could get married instantly, while the State of Nevada grew wealthy on granting easy divorces. In the dining-car on a train the waiter removed somebody's glass of whisky: 'We're crossing a dry State'.

I went to see the distinguished scientist Vladimir Zworykin, the inventor of the iconoscope. He lived in a beautiful house near Philadelphia. He talked at great length about the rapid strides advanced science was making in America. I knew that Einstein and Fermi owed much to the USA. Roman Jakobson spent a whole night describing to me the future of thinking machines. In Princeton I saw splendid lecture theatres, laboratories and libraries. Yet in Jackson and in Knoxville I had the utmost difficulty in finding a bookshop.

I described my contradictory impressions in my articles. These impressions were naturally often fortuitous and in some cases certainly mistaken, because it is impossible to understand an alien country and way of life in so short a time. However, I did not fall for the easy temptation to lampoon America. In 1946 the cold war was gaining ground fast and those Americans who were fostering it eagerly welcomed some of the reports and articles that appeared in our press. *Harper's Magazine*, which was in the forefront of the anti-Soviet campaign, published a translation of my articles but in its editorial comment admitted that the details did not matter so much as the general impression which the articles would make on the Soviet reader. He would not, the editorial went on, see America as a coarse, greedy, mechanized and soulless monster, as it had been depicted in the past by such European sociologists as, for instance, André Siegfried. These articles, it pointed out, had appeared in *Izvestia* between June and September, at the time of the now famous 'cultural purge' which had victimized many writers and film directors. A leader in *Izvestia* had said: 'What can the best Soviet citizens, the creators of Soviet culture, learn from the "fashionable" toilers in the field of art in the West and in America today, who express the moral decay and rottenness of the capitalist régime?' Reading this, said *Harper's* editorial, had given rise to fears and it drew attention to a passage in my fourth article which said: 'We have much to learn from American writers and American architects, and even (in spite of the appalling vulgarity of the average production) from their film directors'. The magazine expressed con-

cern lest these articles had endangered my position. It hoped that I had taken the precaution of removing my tie. (Anti-Soviet journalists hoped that I would be destroyed and to this day they cannot forgive me for having stayed alive.)

However, my articles were not dictated solely by a desire to quell the cold war. I realized that Europeans were beginning to resemble Americans in their attachment to creature comforts, in a certain oversimplification of their inward life and in the cult of technology and sport. I wanted to reassure myself and, bearing in mind the representatives of the new intelligentsia whom I had met in New York, Boston and New Orleans, I tried to show that many Americans were beginning to resemble Europeans: 'America is not a world that stands still, it is constantly shifting. Yesterday's puritans become hard-drinking neurotics, Hemingway characters. The sons of Baptists and Methodists read the *New Yorker* which satirizes Americanism. In fact, no European will ever be able to debunk America as well as the Americans do it themselves; and in this lies the promise of growth. I am certain that those Americans who criticize America are fervently patriotic. They are the new pioneers; they too are consumed with a fever, but not with "gold fever": they are searching for spiritual values; skyscrapers do not satisfy them, and if they deride these soaring buildings it is not because they prefer shacks but because they prefer soaring thoughts and soaring emotions.'

All this is probably true, but 'a story is soon told' while history meanders. The progress of science has become universal. The Americans were dismayed to see the supremacy of Soviet technology in certain fields; but this stemmed more from the calculations of politicians and generals than from any searching for 'soaring thoughts and soaring emotions'.

During the years of what is today called the 'personality cult' cybernetics was treated as charlatanism in our country. The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* included the subject for the first time in its supplementary volume. Our cybernetics experts recall the past with anger; one of them transferred his resentment to art, as if 'the anachronistic enthusiasm for Bach and Blok' were responsible for instigating the campaign against the new science. Meanwhile those who banned cybernetics threw uneasy glances at art. I continued and still continue my dispute not so much with America as with 'Americanism'. Norbert Wiener's book fascinated me (although I did not understand all of it). I have

heard electronic music, and I can readily believe that machines for composing verse do it quicker and no worse than many members of the Writers' Union. But machines do not replace Bach or Blok, nor will they ever be able to do so.

Perhaps in the near future interplanetary spaceships will afford greater comfort to couples lacking a marriage certificate than today's Cadillacs and Buicks; one does not need much imagination to visualize it. I do not care to think that the people of the future will not have the educated heart which distinguishes the experience of love known to the characters of Shakespeare, Goethe and Leo Tolstoy from the couplings of Pithecanthropus.

The ancients represented the goddess of wisdom with an owl, and Marx said that Minerva's owl flies only in the dusk. It is mortifying that one should start flights of meditation only when the dusk of life is falling.

OUR TRIP to America was in the nature of a return visit: in 1945 three American journalists had come to the Soviet Union. The cold war had only just begun. At the time of our visit the Americans were negotiating with the Soviet Union to increase the number of copies of the Russian language magazine *America* and to facilitate the work of American correspondents in Moscow, so Byrnes, the Secretary of State, was anxious to show his goodwill. The press informed its readers that the three Red journalists had been invited to get to know America. It was said that we would tour the country freely at the US government's expense. We refused the money but thought we should take advantage of the permission to move about freely. Galaktionov would have preferred to stay in New York, where there were many Soviet officials, but after consultation with the ambassador he agreed to go to Chicago for a few days; when we were received by Byrnes's assistant Benton the general said that he wanted to see the production of the big Chicago newspapers. Simonov opted for the West Coast, including Hollywood. Then it was my turn: 'I'd like to go to the Southern States'. Benton tried to dissuade me: it was a long way, air communications were poor and, besides, there were few good hotels. I pointed out that the distance between Moscow and Washington was even greater, that I could go by train and that we were not too much accustomed to comfort. Benton repeated that we were perfectly free to choose.

Marquis Childs, a Washington journalist or, as they are called in America, a columnist, whose articles are syndicated in dozens of newspapers, wrote: 'It is quite clear why Ehrenburg, the brightest and most aggressive of the three, has chosen "Tobacco Road". He cynically hopes to find in the South the sort of copy that will suit him' (by his reference to Tobacco Road the journalist meant not my passion for smoking but Caldwell's book).

To be quite candid I was not thinking of Caldwell at all, nor of material for my articles; what I wanted to try to understand was something that had long been a mystery to me, namely, the position of

Negroes in America. In my youth I had believed that progress automatically rids people of superstitions and intolerance. I knew that the Southern States of America lagged behind the North, that they had little industry and a certain amount of illiteracy, and I took this as the explanation for the tenacity of racial prejudice. Only when racism triumphed not in a country at the other side of the world but in Germany, with which I was quite familiar, did I realize how extremely jejune these ideas were. The fate of the American Negro no longer seemed an exceptional phenomenon; racism had become part of the life of our time. When I decided to visit the Southern States it was not articles I had in mind but the war which, though it had come to an end, still in many ways lived on inside me; I thought about the many dark realities I had come up against in my life and I wanted to find some clue that would help me to make sense of an epoch so full of contradictions.

During the very first days of my stay in New York I realized that the new World was crammed with the rubbish of old prejudices.

On the newspaper stands there were dozens of papers published in America in various languages: Italian, Polish, Yiddish, German, Spanish, Greek, Armenian, Ukrainian, Serbian, and so on. I once found myself in the Italian quarter where washing hung out on lines across the street, people in *trattorias* twisted long macaroni round their forks, somebody was singing, and I might have been in Genoa or Naples. In the Jewish quarter they sold pickled cucumbers, halva and vodka; there were shop-signs in both Russian and Polish; an old man like a character out of Babel was drinking tea in the street and holding forth: 'Sulzberger says he loves God, if not the Jewish God then at any rate the American one, but evidently this God was so intent on reading the *New York Times* that he didn't notice the Warsaw ghetto being burnt down'.

Even the place-names remind one that the people have come here from all over the world: New York, New Orleans, Manchester, Amsterdam, Peking, Paris, Odessa, Toledo, Frankfurt, Canton, Cambridge, Moscow, Berlin, Rome, Oxford, Cordova. In every branch of science you come across names clearly showing that, even if the scientist himself was born here, at least his grandfather came from Ireland, or Poland, or Germany, or Russia. I wanted to understand why in a country where all races, all nationalities, all languages had gone into the melting pot, racism and a unique hierarchy of nationalities flourished.

Aristocracy recognized family hierarchy: the hereditary nobleman looked down on the newly created one, and he in his turn despised the commoner. In France at the top of the ladder were the princes, after whom in diminishing order came the dukes, the marquesses, the counts, the viscounts, the barons and finally run-of-the-mill nobles whose surnames were preceded by the particle *de*. Blue blood was supposed to run in the veins of the aristocrats. But America had known neither feudalism nor titles. And yet, by some mysterious process, hierarchy of blood came into being: at the top of the ladder are people who stem from English, Scottish, Scandinavian and Dutch families; the Germans are a little lower down the scale, and the French below them. Then rather far down are the Slavs, much lower still the Italians and Irish, and quite near the bottom the Jews, the Chinese and the Puerto Ricans. The Negroes are nowhere at all. There are clubs that will not admit Slavs or Italians. As for the Jews, their position was well explained to me by a talkative American: 'One lunches but one doesn't dine with them', for lunch is a business meeting in a restaurant without wives; one can do business with the Jews but not mix with them socially. I was shown hotels where Jews are not permitted; these are usually at summer resorts, by the sea or on a lake.

A few days after my arrival in New York friends took me to Harlem, the Negro quarter. There I met journalists, writers, actors and musicians, and made friends with some of them.

In theory the Negroes enjoyed full rights. But no flats were let to them in houses where whites resided. They lived in Harlem and, whichever way you look at it, Harlem is a ghetto. I was once returning from there late at night. The taxi-driver took me as far as the boundary of the ghetto and explained that it was not worth his while to go any farther as he would not be able to pick up a fare for the return trip; so he hailed a taxi with a white driver and I changed cabs. There were, of course, rich Negroes, there were even some who held government posts (these were few and the posts were unimportant, but it kept up appearances). However, the majority of the coloured people did rough work, were porters, dustmen, janitors, lift-boys, dishwashers and washerwomen. In Harlem I saw a 'shirt hospital': a workshop where a shirt was patched while the customer waited half-naked — he had only the one shirt.

If a Negro walked into a restaurant kept by a white, he would be told, civilly, that all the tables had been reserved. If he applied for a

better job, he was informed, kindly, that it had already been filled. I wanted to invite some Negro friends to my room, but it appeared that they would not be taken up: I was living on the eighteenth floor and my guests would have learnt that the lift was out of order.

White Americans enjoyed Negro music, Negro singers and actors. Negro companies often gave performances on Broadway. The whites sat in the stalls and clapped. But if after the performance the actors wanted supper, they would have to find a French, Italian or Jewish restaurant, for in an American one it would turn out that all the tables were taken.

Racism has infected even its victims. I have met Negro anti-Semites. And a Jew, in a bad temper, shouted: 'How dare you talk to me like that? I'm not a nigger'. A Mulatto in Washington told me that he was distressed because his daughter had fallen in love with a Negro.

I began my preparations for the journey. Friends arranged for a progressive-minded southerner to go along with me. Daniel Gilmore was the son of an admiral; before the war he had edited the left-wing literary magazine *Friday* (a weekly journal appeared under the same title in Paris, edited by Jean-Richard Bloch and André Chamson). He drove me in his car. This was luck indeed, for I should never have found my own way to the backwoods where this new friend took me.

The State Department informed me that I should be accompanied by the editor of the Russian language magazine *America*. Bill Nelson was the son of a Russian immigrant and spoke excellent Russian. He was a tactful type and we got on very well together.

Nelson approached the authorities in every town and then I would be invited to an official lunch by the president of the Chamber of Commerce, by the editor of an important newspaper or by some government official concerned with cultural affairs. Gilmore had a wide circle of friends and took me to the offices of Negro newspapers, to small towns and cotton plantations. I talked to hundreds of different people: professors and planters, preachers and trade unionists, artists and workers.

It was in Alabama that Gilmore told me that the columnist Sam Grafton wanted to describe a Soviet journalist's trip to the south and asked permission to join our party. From then on the four of us drove about together in the well-worn but roomy Buick.

For some reason my travelling companions took to the Russian custom of calling people by name and patronymic. And so I travelled

with Daniel Goratsiyevich Gilmore, Bill Benediktovich Nelson and Sam Noemovich Grafton. We became very friendly and the southerners often took us all for 'Reds'. We spent the night in hotels, in motels or in rooms let by the local residents in small towns. The southerners proved hospitable and invited us to their homes for meals. I was lucky; I travelled like an American tourist.

In Nashville I spent a day at Fisk, the independent Negro university. Seven hundred young men and women were studying there to become doctors, teachers and lawyers, knowing that they would be able to treat, teach and defend only 'coloured' people. Among the professors was the distinguished chemist Brady. He described to me the conditions under which he was obliged to work. The 'white' university had fine laboratories but he was not allowed to set foot in them, nor could he use the university library but had to get some white young man to go in his stead to look up the necessary material. But when it came to international congresses they sent for him: in Nashville he was a Negro, abroad he was an important American scientist.

(I happened to read an article by the well-known zoologist Ralph Lillie, a professor in the University of Chicago, dedicated to the memory of the biologist Dzost who had died at the beginning of the war, in which he said: 'The whole of Dzost's scientific activity was marked by tragedy: he was a Negro in the USA . . . In Europe he was received in a friendly fashion and it is easy to understand why he condemned himself to voluntary exile; but it is extremely painful to reflect that his knowledge and his selfless devotion to science could not be utilized by his own country'.)

Among the students there was a sandy-haired, freckled girl who spoke to me in Russian. Her father was a Negro and her mother an Odessan; her name was Lillian Waltfield. From her appearance no one would have taken her for a Negro, but in her passport she was described as 'coloured'.

We inspected the Tennessee Valley Project, a vast construction brought into being thanks to Roosevelt. The power-station changed the economy of six Southern States. I admired the roads, the houses, the parks, but everywhere I came across the notice 'For coloured' and thought grimly: may all this marvellous technology go hang if it has to be combined with the indignity of man.

On our journey to the south, Nelson told me about the way free education was organized in America and the large sums spent on

national health. In Mississippi I saw the living conditions of the Negroes, who rented tiny plots of land, and of the agricultural labourers. Huge families were crowded into dark huts where they slept on the floor. Many of them were illiterate, for there were not enough schools for Negroes, and we met people who had never set eyes on a doctor because the fee amounted to a whole family's earnings for three months.

The genial owner of a large plantation who treated us to succulent Southern dishes said: 'My Negroes have it good; I always let them go to church'.

Sam Grafton went inside one of the miserable huts and came out badly shaken: he had never been to the south before. 'You see,' I said, 'I have my uses: thanks to me, Uncle Sam has met Uncle Tom.' Nelson was also in the Southern States for the first time and it depressed him; he never again referred to the medical services or mass education.

I think of the large, bright yellow Mississippi river, the old estates where Margaret Mitchell's romanticized characters lived, and of whose cosiness and comfort our *Saltychikha*¹ never dreamt, and I think of the dark evil-smelling huts, the corroding human sorrow: hunger side by side with plenty, back-breaking labour, and in addition to all this the constant degrading insults: 'Where d'you think you're going, you dirty nigger?' (I heard these words at a tram-stop: the cars reserved for whites were going past practically empty, but there was no room on the platform.)

It is always distressing to witness other people's suffering, need and poverty; I had felt this more than once at home, in Spain and in India. But there has been only one occasion in my life when I found myself lacerated by someone else's humiliation. It happened in New Orleans where I was the guest of pleasant and enlightened people, Gilmore's friends, who lived in a charming house. There was another guest, a tall fair man, who turned out to be an architect. We started to talk about urbanism and Le Corbusier, and then went on to painting. I felt very thirsty, for it was extremely hot, and suggested going to a neighbouring bar to continue our conversation there, but my proposal met with no response. Half an hour later I asked for a glass of water. The architect got up saying it was time for him to go home. After he had left, the hostess explained that, according to his passport, he was 'coloured' and could not go into a bar as he was well known in the

¹ Notorious landowner who flogged her serfs to death.

town. I felt appalled at having put him in an embarrassing position. I no longer wanted to drink nor, to be quite candid, did I want to live.

On another occasion I burnt with shame when a very light-skinned Mulatto girl told me how a railway porter, not realizing she was 'coloured', had put her in a coach for whites. The train began to move and she had no time to change place. A white man called the guard and ordered him to throw out the 'coloured' person. The girl did not look at all like a Mulatto; the guard, who was a kind-hearted man, whispered to her: 'I told him you were a Jewess to account for your black hair'. The girl added: 'And I was so frightened, I felt paralysed'. It was then for the first time that I felt ashamed of being a Jew; I wished I were a black Jew.

In their talks with me the segregationists, or to put it plainly, the racists, tried to make out a case for the order of things in the South: there was the natural inequality of races, centuries were needed for the Negroes to catch up with the whites; it was too early to mix socially with them, one had to teach them, create decent conditions for them and give them the kind of jobs they were capable of doing. I heard these arguments over and over again. A lawyer at whose house we dined said the same thing. His young wife added that, whether you liked it or not, every American felt a physical aversion from Negroes. (I felt a physical aversion from the pretty young woman, but as a guest I held my tongue.) We got up and our hostess said she would show us her first-born, just a month old. The baby was brought in by a huge stout Negress with gleaming white teeth: she was the wet-nurse of our hostess's baby son.

In industrial Birmingham many Negroes were employed in engineering factories. We went into the home of one of them; his small room was poor but clean and was shared by five people. We talked about his job and about housing. Then I asked him what his relations were with his white workmates. 'Good at work.' 'Do you go to any of their homes?' 'No.' 'And do they come to see you?' 'Never. You're the first white man to set foot in this house.'

In New Orleans I went to the Seamen's Union. The secretary showed me round the club and said that their Union was labelled Red because Negroes took part in the general meetings, while in other Unions there were special sections for them. 'Those are the places for Negroes,' the secretary said pointing out the benches that were no worse than the others but nevertheless meant segregation.

I remember a long and frank talk I had with a lawyer named Robertson. He was a good man; racial discrimination nauseated him and he did what he could to help the Negroes. He told me about a monstrous case. A white woman conceived a passion for a Negro called Willy McGee, a truck driver. She used to take him to her home. The neighbours gossiped about it. One day the husband came home unexpectedly. The woman screamed that she was being raped. Everybody, including the judges, knew that she was lying but no one said so at the trial. Robertson tried in vain to save Willy McGee who was condemned to death. In the town of Albertville six whites raped a Negro woman; although everybody knew they were guilty they were acquitted. Robertson recalled other cases in the State of Mississippi. I asked him why racism was so tenacious. 'I'm sorry to have to admit it,' he replied, 'but the fact is it's in us from childhood, we're all poisoned by this abomination. Take us, now; we have a Negro maid. My wife and I treat her decently enough. Not long ago she had a baby. When her labour started we called a doctor. I went and looked at the baby and caught myself thinking: yes, a living creature but it's not the same as a white one. I was disgusted by myself.'

I realized that the whole thing went much further than Hitler's ghastly undertaking. Certainly America had no Auschwitz, no Treblinka. Cases of lynching were becoming rare. Yet in 1946 there were laws in the Southern States very similar to those which Globke laboured to produce. (Until recently he occupied a highly honoured position in West Germany.) Nor had the Southern slave-owners been innovators either. A law promulgated in the thirteenth century by the Spanish King Alfonso X – known as the Wise, and who did, indeed, patronize astronomy and other sciences – contained seven clauses prescribing the separation of Christians from Jews and imposing restrictions on the Jews very similar to those existing in the middle of the twentieth century for Negroes in the Southern States of America.

I know that now there have been many changes. Even American reactionaries have come to realize that Africa has awakened and that the persecution of Negroes in the United States precludes the possibility of good relations with the newly emerged States. And even inside America itself one can observe changes in the public attitude of mind. It is, of course, a good thing that, a hundred years after war was declared on the rebel slave-owners and racists, a law has been passed giving the franchise to the Negroes in the South. However, this event

has coincided with bloodshed in the streets of Los Angeles, with shootings in Alabama and Mississippi, with the accumulated hatred of the oppressed and the oppressors, and with the secret hostility of the liberal 'liberators' towards the liberated.

It is not merely a matter of abrogating loathsome laws; much depends on a change in people's inner consciousness. Not even the most advanced legislation can rid their minds of ancient prejudices, for these are concealed, they camouflage themselves, they seek new rationalizations more in keeping with contemporary thought, only to reveal themselves suddenly in all their hideous nakedness. It is not to censure the Americans that I have described my trip to the South; this book is not a collection of political articles. I think over what I have seen and experienced, and I try to find the right answers. When in my youth I thought that light banishes darkness I believe I was right; only in those distant years I often mistook education for culture and erudition for conscience. The solution surely lies in the harmonious development of man, and this calls for a great deal of spiritual strength, intelligence, and also time; but unless men shoulder the task they will die a death unworthy of mankind: we shall see the triumph of death-dealing weapons over the fragility of the 'unthinking reed', and they will die whatever the colour of their skin or the shape of their nose.

8

I THOUGHT I had lost the faculty for feeling surprise: I had flown across the ocean, I had visited a variety of countries, met many famous and a few great men, lived through three wars, the Revolution, the year nineteen-thirty-seven, fascism, victory, and yet, quite unexpectedly, on 14th May 1946 I was struck dumb, like a child who for the first time witnesses some extraordinary natural phenomenon: I was taken to Princeton and found myself face to face with Einstein. I spent only a few hours with him but my memory retains those hours better than many an important event in my life. One can forget joy and trouble, but one never forgets amazement; it etches itself too deeply into one's memory.

I had of course seen photographs of Einstein – who has not? – but he looked different in the flesh, possibly because the photographs had been taken a long time ago, or possibly because the camera is not a human eye. Einstein, when I met him, was sixty-seven years old; his grey hair, worn very long, gave him something of the look of a nineteenth-century musician or a hermit. He was wearing a sweater and no coat, and a fountain-pen stuck 'into the turtle neck protruded just under his chin. He pulled a notebook out of his trousers pocket. His features were sharp, clear-cut, and his eyes astonishingly young, by turns sad, alert or concentrated, then suddenly full of mischievous laughter like a boy's. During the first few minutes he seemed a very old man, but he had only to start talking, to run out into the garden, to throw me a glance of mocking gaiety, for this first impression to vanish. He was young with the youth that years cannot subdue; he himself expressed it in this casual phrase: 'I live and I feel puzzled, and all the time I try to understand'.

In *Julio Jurenito*, written in 1921, I spoke of having read a popular exposition of the Theory of Relativity. I am extremely ignorant in many fields of science (a fact of which I am fortunately aware), the results of an incomplete education. I absorbed the popular exposition, though even that I did not entirely understand, and was rather vague about some things. On the way from New York to Princeton I felt

nervous: what should I, an ignoramus, be able to talk about to a great scientist? I confided my apprehensions to the Jewish writer Brainin who was taking me to Princeton. He replied that Einstein was a simple man and that he had asked to meet me because he was interested in Russia and in the threat of a new war. This did not entirely reassure me. But as soon as Einstein began to talk my fears evaporated. Of course I answered his questions and enlarged on some points, but today it seems to me that it was only he who spoke, while I listened and if I did open my mouth it was to gape.

Everything amazed me: his appearance, his life story, his wisdom, his spirit of challenge, but above all the fact that here was I actually drinking coffee with Einstein while he talked to me.

(On one occasion I was sitting next to Joliot-Curie at a meeting of the World Peace Council. One speaker followed another reiterating well-known truths. Meanwhile Joliot-Curie, leaning close to my ear, began talking about the pattern of the physicist's life. Something must have been said to start this train of thought. 'Physicists,' he said, 'are like poets, they make their discoveries in their youth. It's a matter of inspiration. Fermi created his theory of the beta-decomposition of radio-active atoms when he was thirty-three. Rutherford showed his genius at thirty-two. Broglie and Pauli made their important discoveries at thirty-one, Dirac at twenty-six. And do you know how old Einstein was when he formulated his special Theory of Relativity? Twenty-six.' Joliot-Curie eyes sparkled merrily, then he grew grave: 'We must listen to what this chap's saying'. I wrote down Joliot-Curie's words on the agenda paper.)

It was, of course, the sheer stature of the man I was about to meet which made me feel nervous on my way to Princeton. I remembered Langevin saying in 1934: 'Einstein has upset the whole of natural science. Before him physicists thought that everything was known, but he has proved that there is another way of looking at things. Modern physics begins with him, and not only physics, but all modern science.'

He destroyed the old conception of the academic physicist bounded by the limits of his special discipline. I knew that he was a friend of Romain Rolland, that in 1915 he had spoken out against the war; I knew of his fight against fascism, and the man I now saw helped me to understand a great deal about our epoch, so full of contradictions.

Much later I read his autobiographical notes and studies in *Einstein*,

Philosopher-Scientist, and the reminiscences of his friends, and realized that my amazement had been a natural thing. His life was like a turbulent mountain river. To begin with there is his nationality: he started life as a German subject, then became a Swiss citizen and finally an American one. At the time he made his great discovery he was officially a third grade examiner at the Berne Patent Office. Three years later, when all the leading scientists of the world were talking about his discovery, he was lecturing at Berne University to an audience of two students. Soon people began to speak of him not only at learned meetings but in trams. He gave courses of lectures in Zurich, Prague, Berlin, Leiden, Pasadena and Princeton; he travelled to many European countries and to India, Palestine and Japan. He met, he had intimate talks with the most diverse personalities. I am not speaking about scientists – it was natural that he should have ties of friendship with many of them – but I should like to mention some of the surprising encounters which he has referred to in his writings or in conversation: Romain Rolland and Earl (Bertrand) Russell, Kafka and Charlie Chaplin, Rabindranath Tagore and Chicherin (the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs), Martin Buber the historian of Hasidism and Bernard Shaw, Albert the King of the Belgians and the Negro singer Marian Anderson, President Roosevelt and Nehru. He hated receptions, applause and adulation and rarely spoke in public; he loved to play the fiddle, was a passionate gardener, enjoyed sailing (he even wrote an article on the problems of sailing a yacht), while at the same time there was not a world event to which he did not react selflessly and passionately. During the years of the First World War, hearing that Romain Rolland had come out against nationalistic blindness, he joined him in Switzerland and publicly opposed the universal carnage. He courageously welcomed the October Revolution and branded German militarism. In him fascism found an implacable enemy. He was no nationalist, German or Jewish or American. When he was appealing for funds to found a Hebrew University in Palestine, he said: 'I have seen Jews humiliated in Germany, and it made my heart bleed. I have seen the schools, the satirical journals and all possible means of propaganda mobilized for the purpose of crushing in my Jewish brothers their faith in themselves'. He did everything he could for Spain defending her dignity. He lent his support to many organizations campaigning against the threat of a new war. He resigned from the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation of the League

of Nations which, he declared, was abetting the strong and encouraging aggressors. In America he publicly declared that he sympathized with Socialism and was a friend of the Soviet Union. He called discrimination against Negroes 'a dark blot on the conscience of every American'. During the Second World War he helped to raise funds for aid to the Soviet Union. He condemned the use of atomic weapons, anathematized the cold war, advocated general disarmament and, a month before his death, was working on the draft of an appeal that was to be signed by himself, Bertrand Russell and Joliot-Curie.

He had many enemies. There were scientists who tried to confute his theories which they suspected of undermining their tiny reputations, acquired by fair means or foul. The German fascists hated him: for them he was first and foremost a Jew. An 'Anti-Einstein' organization was set up and joined by several famous physicists, including some Nobel prize-winners. They embarked upon the systematic persecution of Einstein: lectures were sabotaged, pseudo-scientific satires and pamphlets were published. In 1922 the Camelots du Roi, on learning that Einstein was coming to Paris, organized a hostile demonstration. When Hitler came to power Einstein was condemned to death *in absentia* and a high price was set on his head. In 1933 certain obscurantists clamoured for him to be debarred from entering the United States. In 1945 John Elliott Rankin, speaking in Congress, called on the government to deal with this agitator called Einstein who had dared to speak against Franco's regime. Five years later this Rankin referred to Einstein as an old charlatan, who called himself a scientist but was in fact a member of the Communist camp. The notorious Committee on Un-American Activities put him under observation.

In my notebooks I find some of Einstein's sayings which I recorded immediately on my return to New York. Of the Americans he said: 'They're like children, sometimes charming, sometimes unruly. It's bad when children start playing with matches. It's better if they play with bricks . . . I don't think the average American reads less than the average European but he reads different things, and, more important, he reads in a different way. I once asked a student whether he had read a certain book and he said: "I think so, but I can't remember. Anyhow, that book came out quite a few years ago, it must be out of date by now". A fellow like that is interested only in the latest thing . . . They're very good at forgetting here. During the war the average

American's reaction to the word "Stalingrad" was to take off his wristwatch and send it to a Red Army man. Mikhoëls and Feffer saw it happen. Today you get a very different reaction to that word from many people: show the Russians we've got the atom bomb. Of course it's the result of the press campaign . . . In Central Africa there was a small tribe – I say "was" because it's a long time since I read about it – where the people gave their children names like Hill, Palm-Tree, Dawn, Hawk, and so on. When a man died his name became tabu, and so they had to find new words for a hill or a hawk. It's clear that this tribe could have no history, no traditions, no legends, and so it could not develop because everything had to be started from scratch all the time. Many Americans remind me of those tribesmen . . . I read a hair-raising account of Hiroshima in the *New Yorker*. I ordered a hundred copies by telephone and distributed them among my students. Later one of them thanked me and said enthusiastically: "What a marvellous bomb!" Of course there are other kinds of people . . . But all this is very painful . . . I made a public speech in the autumn. It looks as if I shall have to do it again'.

He went back to the bomb: 'You see, the greatest danger lies in trusting logic. You feel certain that 2 and 2 make 4. I don't . . . It's a terrible thing that Roosevelt died when he did; he wouldn't have let it happen'.

(It was only later that I learnt about what is regarded as Einstein's tragedy. A month before the outbreak of the Second World War some friends of Einstein who were physicists informed him that they were working in Germany to produce an atom bomb. Since their seizure of Czechoslovakia the Nazis had access to uranium. Einstein was persuaded to write to Roosevelt. This he did. In April 1945, when it became clear that the Nazis had not yet succeeded in producing an atom bomb, but that the Americans had, Einstein wrote to the President a second time beseeching him not to have recourse to this cataclysmic weapon. Roosevelt died without reading this letter, and a few months later the new President, Truman, gave the order for the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.)

I knew that Einstein was interested in the *Black Book*, the general title of a collection of human documents: diaries, letters and statements by eye-witnesses concerning Nazi crimes against the Jewish people in the occupied territories. I had brought with me certain published material and photographs. Einstein examined them with close atten-

tion and when he raised his eyes I read grief in them, and his lips twitched slightly. He said: 'I have often said that the potentialities of knowledge are unlimited, as is the knowable. Now I think that vileness and cruelty also have no limits.'

He asked me where I intended to go. I told him that in two days I should be leaving for the south as I wanted to see how the Negroes lived. He said: 'They live in terrible conditions. It's shameful. The actions of the legislatures in the Southern States are covered by some of the counts of the Nuremberg indictment'. A few minutes later, when we had gone out into the garden and a photographer was pestering us, he told me about a beautiful young American girl who, defending racial discrimination, had asked him the usual question: 'What would you say if your son announced that he was going to marry a Negress?' He said he had replied: 'I don't know. I should probably ask to meet his *fiancée*. But if my son announced that he wanted to marry you I should certainly lose both sleep and appetite', and his eyes lit up with a challenging gleam.

He asked me about the Soviet Union and then said: 'I feel sure that you'll be able to restore the economy very quickly. In fact, I believe in Russia. Tell me, do you see Stalin often?' I said I had never talked to him face to face. 'A pity; I should have liked to know what he's like as a man. A Communist told me that I was behind the times, exaggerating the role of the individual. Of course I'm not a Marxist but I know well enough that the objective world exists outside the individual's subjective appraisals. And yet the individual plays a most important part. I can picture Lenin to myself far better: I've read about him, met people who'd known him. He commands respect not only as a politician but also as a man of high moral integrity'.

There is a note of another thing he said, though I cannot remember at what stage of our conversation: 'I was greatly impressed by *The Brothers Karamazov*. It's one of those books that shatter the mechanical conception of man's inner world, of the limits of good and evil'.

As we parted he said: 'The main thing now is to prevent an atomic catastrophe. It's a good thing that you've come to America. I hope more Russians will come and talk to us. Mankind must prove itself more intelligent than Epimetheus who opened Pandora's box and could not shut it again. *Au revoir*, come again'.

Ten days later I heard a familiar voice on the radio: Einstein was speaking about the deadly danger hanging over humanity, about the

necessity to come to an understanding with the Russians, to renounce atomic weapons, not to arm but to disarm – in this way he tried to shut Pandora's box.

As I listened, my memory evoked the small grey house with its green shutters, the books, the manuscripts, the charred pipes – it seemed abandoned, as if the master had already left the familiar easy things of life for a world without bounds. In my mind's eye I saw the old man with the fountain-pen sticking out of his collar. I saw his luminous eyes and the strands of white hair streaming in the autumn wind.

9

IT HAPPENED in New York at the very beginning of my stay in America. I was trying on a pair of trousers in an ill-lit tailor's fitting-room, when I was suddenly blinded by a flash-bulb. The cameraman assured me that he wanted to photograph me in the street and had taken this picture purely as a joke – I could have it as a souvenir – and of course it would not be published. Equally of course it appeared the next day in one of the evening papers accompanied by the information that Ehrenburg had refused to have a zip-fastener and preferred the old-fashioned fly-buttons. Instead of laughing I felt angry, and when I met the paper's editor a few days later I asked him why he had printed this indiscreet photograph: after all, I was not a film-star but an elderly writer. 'It's what we call human interest,' he explained. 'But why in a man's lower half?' He gave me a surprised look, then roared with laughter: 'That's rich! You've got a genuine American sense of humour. Tomorrow that'll make the front page'.

At first I was astonished by the character of many American newspapers, but I got used to it and ceased to notice it. What did continue to disturb me was something rather different: the first signs of what a year later was christened the Cold War.

I remember in Knoxville suddenly feeling petrified as I was glancing through a paper: it said that in Psalm 120 a place called Mesech is mentioned where dwelt 'him that hateth peace', and that the prophet Ezekiel inveighed against Meshech for worshipping Gog and Magog, and that clearly Mesech and Meshech were none other than Moscow. Of course Knoxville is a little provincial town and one could afford to smile at such imbecility and hysteria. But the next day I talked to a farmer who had received me very hospitably and who had said: 'What a calamity! The fighting's only just ended and now we'll have to start all over again, not with the Germans this time but with the Russians'. He said this without a hint of belligerence or even animosity, rather with an air of regret. I heard views of this sort constantly, although the Nuremberg trial was still proceeding, and on the first anniversary of the victory over Hitler many people remembered that the Russians had

been their allies. Newspaper boys would shout: 'Red tanks advancing on Teheran!' No one paid attention to the denial of such statements – only to the shock they caused. I asked people conversant with foreign policy why they regarded a Third World War as inevitable. They did not quote from the Bible but said things like: 'The Russians plan to seize Persia . . . Within the next few months Russia will attack Turkey . . . Moscow is laying claims to Greece . . . The Reds threaten war if Tito doesn't get Trieste'.

I spent two and a half months in America and in that short space of time there was a perceptible change for the worse: the press more and more frequently gave vent to hostility, people whom we met were more on their guard. This was as yet only the very onset of the cold war; there were still hopes that yesterday's allies would come to an agreement. I met politicians who tried to stand up for the Roosevelt line, such as the former Vice-President Henry Wallace, the former ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph Davies, Senator Claude Pepper and Congressmen Coffee and Thomas. They spoke on the same platform with us at large meetings. Twenty thousand Americans came to Madison Square Garden; there were speeches by the Soviet ambassador Gromyko, the three of us and Davies. In the oily semi-darkness of the vast hall I caught friendly smiles.

Nevertheless the mood of the average American changed under our eyes. I was impressed by the vivid imagination of reporters on the Hearst press: they wrote barefaced lies about us, though we were on the spot. Various papers asserted that I was travelling under the surveillance of a GPU agent, and friendly Bill Nelson laughed when I introduced him as 'secret agent of the Red police, official of the State Department, Mr Nelson'. I arrived in Boston with Simonov; we had travelled by night and were met at the station by a member of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship. Reporters pressed round us and we answered questions until finally the member of the Council said: 'Let these folks get their breakfast and take a rest'. The evening paper appeared with a banner headline: 'Russian consul forbids Soviet writers to talk to pressmen'. I asked the editor why he allowed such nonsense to be published, for there was no Soviet consul in Boston. He said there had been a misunderstanding, the reporter had misheard 'consul' for 'council'. This may or may not have been the case: I have often noticed that where politics comes in misunderstandings are often a form of understanding and nonsense has its own sense.

The Hearst press called me 'a disguised agitator', 'comrade-cynic' and 'Ilya of the Comintern'. This last sounded quite honorific. (Two years later the same papers used much more colourful terms; the two I can remember are: 'the Kremlin abortion' and 'the pinheaded mercenary'.)

A friend of Roosevelt gave me this explanation of America's new policy: 'Truman doesn't have a war in mind. He believes that Communism threatens certain western European countries and could triumph if the Soviet Union were to recover economically and forge ahead. An implacable American policy and atom bomb tests will force Russia to spend all her strength and her resources on modernizing her armaments. The supporters of the "hard line" talk about the threat of Soviet tanks, but what they're doing in fact is to declare war on Soviet saucupans'.

Two months after this conversation Truman called for the resignation of the Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, who advocated an agreement with the Soviet Union.

United States officials were polite to us, we travelled freely about the country and spoke at meetings, and we suffered only from certain newspapermen who were trying to jump the gun. We were present at the opening scenes of the first act. We had wanted to go to Mexico and Cuba where we had been invited, but a cable came from Moscow advising us to accept the invitation of the National Council for Canadian-Soviet Friendship and speak in Toronto and Montreal. We had to comply.

While we were still in New York a Canadian diplomat brought me an invitation to visit Ottawa (after Montreal) as guests of the Canadian government. He said, with a diplomat's smile, that in Ottawa we should have some leisure since guests of the government must abstain from making public speeches.

As soon as we crossed the frontier we realized what kind of leisure awaited us. This was just at the time when certain Canadians accused of divulging military secrets to the Soviet Union were on trial. The main witness for the prosecution was a cipher clerk in the office of the Soviet military attaché, Igor Guzenko, who had succumbed to bribery and the prospect of a comfortable life. He was the star turn at the trial; he wore a bullet-proof waistcoat and the papers extolled his courage. Considering that all States, large and small, engage in espionage, such cases are usually conducted without unnecessary publicity and the

papers merely say that the accused 'were working in the interests of a foreign power'. In this case the Canadian government (hardly of its own free will) launched a vicious campaign against the Soviet Union. Every day the papers spoke of 'the Red menace'. In Ottawa hirelings or volunteers mobbed the Soviet embassy and shouted abuse at Moscow. So the atmosphere was not quite suitable for a peaceful introduction to the country. I remember our first evening in Toronto. We had been invited to dine with an important newspaper proprietor who said he wanted to have a talk about means of strengthening cultural ties with Russia and establishing mutual understanding. On the same night there was a dinner given by the Russian War Relief Committee which I had to attend, so I told the newspaper proprietor that I would drop in for an hour afterwards. The dinner went off normally, complete with chairman's gavel, noble speeches, cheques and applause. I knew the drill by now and painstakingly performed everything expected of me. The newspaper proprietor lived out of town in a house set in beautiful grounds. When I entered his dining-room I at once felt that something was amiss. Galaktionov was sitting motionless with pursed lips while Simonov pretended to be examining some engravings on the wall. My entrance had apparently interrupted the conversation. Coffee was brought in, and I had just picked up my cup when our host, addressing Galaktionov, said: 'And so you can understand why the Canadians are justified in seeing a spy in every Soviet visitor'. I got up and said I was tired and wanted to go to bed. Our host realized that he had gone too far and started saying that he loved Russia and welcomed our visit. We stood about for a few minutes and left.

Then the press conferences began. The Canadians of the Soviet Friendship Council were powerless to curb the newspapermen. In vain we spoke about life and culture in the Soviet Union. We were asked questions about espionage, about the Kremlin's war preparations, about the coming war. At the first press conference I said: 'I like this country and its people, but two things surprise me: why do your journalists keep talking about a new war? Aren't you interested in the way we live, in how we fought and how we are rebuilding our destroyed towns? And my second question is this: according to its constitution Canada is a bilingual country, and yet at the frontier they don't understand when you speak French, and it's the same at the post office and among the newspapermen too: I can see it now by your faces - the majority don't understand me'.

My words were honey to the French press of Montreal and Quebec. The French language papers informed their readers in large print that 'Ehrenburg finds that in Canada they talk too much about war and not enough French'. This predisposed the French papers – for the most part extremely right-wing – in our favour.

At first we did not answer questions bearing on the trial. Some of the press accused us of cowardice. When at a dinner given by the Canadian Legion Press the same question was put for the tenth time I found it impossible to keep silent. I still have the copy of *La Patrie* where my answer was printed: 'The Soviet government has published its views on the case. I shall tell you what I, as a Soviet citizen, think about it. The case has a legal aspect which I do not intend to touch upon. But it also has a political aspect. I saw the Canadian troops in France during the First World War and they were on one of the most difficult sectors of the front. Their part was a dangerous but an honourable one. I saw them again during the Second World War, this time on the Scheldt, and again in the thick of it. It seems to me that in the verbal war declared on the Soviet Union the Canadians have landed in the vanguard. That is dangerous but can hardly be called honourable. I do not understand why Canada should be an instigator. I think it would be better for us all to come to an understanding and be friends'.

Naturally the papers began to accuse me of interfering in the internal affairs of Canada. In Montreal the authorities warned us that it would be better to cancel our meeting as disturbances were being organized. Owing to the state of his health Galaktionov reacted particularly badly to what was going on. Nevertheless the meeting was not cancelled. I spoke in French, and to speak without an interpreter in that city was enough to win the goodwill of the audience straight away.

I wanted to spend at least a day in Quebec to look round this old French town, but the government representative told me that there was not a room to be had for the night.

Most unpleasant of all was our stay in Ottawa. We were surrounded by minor government officials. We spent one day at our embassy where we were able to rest and entertain its staff who were now installed there as if they had taken sanctuary.

On the last day we were unexpectedly invited to meet the Prime Minister. It was decided that Galaktionov and Simonov should go and make excuses for me, saying that I was tired and not feeling well; the reason was that I had become the main target of the attacks. The

Prime Minister realized that it was a diplomatic indisposition and tried to exonerate himself. When we took our seats in the plane I felt relief: thank God it was over! At Albany the plane came down. We were held up for a long time on the airfield and were then told that the weather was unsuitable and that it had been arranged for the passengers to go on by train.

We spent several hours in Albany without a programme, without reporters, without friends. It was an ordinary provincial American town. Young men in new suits and bright ties walked about the streets. Loud but at the same time rather taciturn men sat on high stools in the bars; they did not talk to one another at all, but from time to time uttered harsh noises, ordering 'bourbon and soda', or swearing, or exclaiming 'yeah!' In the shop windows there were plastic lovelies flooded with a sinister blue light, to remind you of the cheapness of summer dresses and the attainability of ten-minutes' pleasure. We sat in a bar, strolled about the streets, and went to the station and back, waiting for the train.

That evening in Albany has stayed in my memory because I fell into conversation with one of the customers at the bar. He looked about fifty and his copper-red face glistened with sweat, for it was a hot evening. He had spent two years in Brussels and spoke good French. He told me his life story: his father had been a small planter in the State of Nebraska; in his childhood he had known poverty, if not real need. His father set him on his feet by sending him to a business college, after which he went to work for a firm making sanitary equipment, devised some new form of advertising, for which he got a bonus, left the job, went to San Francisco, opened a tiny sausage factory and soon grew rich thanks to a first-class Hungarian assistant who had escaped from prison. He soon got tired of salami and went into insurance. Then he went to Belgium and took a job there, but he did not like the European way of life. He went back home and started publishing a small financial paper. He won the reputation of being an enterprising man. By this time he was making his way and got married. Suddenly the slump came, he was ruined, sold hot-dogs in the street and contemplated suicide, more particularly when his wife started having an affair with the local police chief. But then, things come and go, the slump ended, he took heart, found a partner, and opened a private inquiry agency in Cleveland. He began to be interested in politics and was active in the election campaign, though unsuccessfully, since he

was working for the Republicans and it was Roosevelt who got in. He married again, this time a widow who provided him with a good-for-nothing stepson but also her savings. He bought a small factory which made safes, and then came Pearl Harbour, the factory turned over to war production on government contracts and expanded. At one point he suffered a serious setback: the factory's products were found to be defective, newspapers bribed by a competitor demanded his prosecution, he had to spend a mint of money on expensive lawyers, everybody was having a high old time while he was sunk. But his wife dug into her savings, they sold the factory and moved to Albany where he went into advertising. Now things were going well for him, he had a staff of eleven. His stepson had reformed and even turned out to be quite gifted: he had invented a form of strip neon-light advertising which also gave stock exchange prices and political news, and had obtained the advertising accounts of Heinz, Camel and three banks. At this point the stepfather had been offered the job of manager of the Paris branch of a large firm, and his stepson was to be put in charge of the office at home.

I asked him whether he had not found this restless life a strain. He smiled pityingly: 'I'm not a Belgian, a Frenchman or a Russian, I'm a hundred per cent American. In May I'll be fifty-four, just about in my prime. I've got a load of ideas in my head, I can still get to the top'. He grew philosophical: 'I've nothing against the Russians. They fought well. They're probably good businessmen. But from what I've read in the *Times* you don't have private initiative or competition, the only guys who can make good are politicians and civil engineers; everybody else works for a wage. There's no kick in that. Why, if anyone had said to me in the days of the great slump' (as the crisis of the late twenties was always called): '“We'll give you a good salary on condition you don't shift from one State to another or switch from one kind of work to another,” I'd have cut my throat. I guess you can't understand that. Sure! In Brussels I saw the slow way folks live, putting money by for a rainy day and degenerating: all the young fellows there are mentally impotent'.

Here Simonov came up to say it was time for us to go to the station.

It was dark in the Pullman, everybody was asleep behind drawn curtains. I went into the car next to the lavatory where one could smoke, read and drink soda water. There I wrote down the story of my chance bar acquaintance.

In Boston, a week later, we boarded the *Ile de France*. Before the war it had been a luxury liner but later it was used to transport American troops to Europe. Soldiers are soldiers everywhere, and they left the once smart saloons and cabins in a state that reflected their own spiritual chaos.

Owing to a strike of stevedores in Boston the freight was handled by blacklegs, and there was a lot of it because Europe was returning to Europe. The *Ile de France* was carrying the most extraordinary assemblage of people: Jules Romains (whom the title of Academician – or *Immortel* – complete with uniform and sword, awaited at home), a Rumanian woman Communist who had spent six years in a Bucharest prison, a Belgian cigar manufacturer and a Czech professor. They were all going to hungry, ruined Europe and taking with them fur coats and stacks of coffee, tinned food and washing-machines. In the daytime one could catch odd scraps of conversation on deck. An Italian student, shouting in his excitement, said that it was time to finish off the ‘damned priests’. An aristocratic old lady from Poitiers said plaintively: ‘My son-in-law writes to say that there’s a danger of revolution in France. He thinks Bidault is a good man, but weak, and has allowed Thorez into the Hotel Matignon. And the partisans have kept their arms and hidden them. There’s no doubt it’s more peaceful in America, but I want to die at home’. Young people argued over Sartre’s books, over whether there would be Communism in France and whether the ruined towns ought to be restored in their old likeness or built in a new style. One and all were thrilled at the thought of the coming reunion with relations and friends and with their native land which they had left many years ago. I do not know what the ships that took the immigrants to America were like, but the *Ile de France* was carrying back people who had been unable to settle down in rich, well-fed America.

If the passengers were full of agitation, the ocean was calm. At night I often sat on the upper deck recording my American impressions, or I sought seclusion in the dark to admire the wide expanses of water. One night I set down on paper my reflections on the journey and returned to the copper-faced American I had met in Albany: ‘In my early youth, when I joined the underground Social Democratic organization at school, I thought about everything in terms of the pamphlets of *Donskaya Rech* (Don Speech), in which it was clearly stated that Socialism would triumph first in countries where there was a high con-

centration of capital and advanced industrialization. What happened was exactly the opposite: in the mountains of Montenegro people shout: "Belgrade – Moscow!" and in America capitalism is enjoying if not exactly youth, at least the "prime of life", to use the expression of the Albany fellow. He is not a chance buccaneer but the product of a buccaneering world. What he values is beginnings not ends. We must come to terms with America for there will be no revolution there in the foreseeable future. The difficulty of reaching an understanding is created by the Americans. On the whole they are a peaceful people but far too excitable'.

My thoughts turned back to what I had heard in Canada, and did so with horror: that, too, was not at all according to the political textbooks. The post-war years were beginning to turn into pre-war years. What I wanted was to finish writing about the storm that had subsided, but the people with whom I had argued in Canada had already turned their backs on the recent past: the storm for them was only just blowing up and the wind was raising the dust.

The ocean heaved like a man troubled by uneasy dreams, but for the Atlantic this was only a slight disturbance. A rowing boat might have been tossed about but the glasses in the bar of the *Ile de France* barely tinkled. The nights were of a July warmth with a prodigal scattering of stars in the sky. What did I think about? I hardly know. Probably the same things that everybody thinks about when, for a week or so, they are detached from the bustle of life, floating on a featureless expanse of water, under the stars: they ponder on the past, on unwritten books, on the fact that it is time to sum up.

I remember only that one night Galaktionov came up on deck and joined me. He complained of insomnia and said that it was very pleasant up here with the sea air and the stars, and then started to recite: '... and one star speaks to another¹'. He left me after a while and I went down to my cabin. I felt like writing poetry but instead wrote these words: 'We have seldom spoken to one another in our lives, surely far less often than one star to another'.

¹ From a poem by Lermontov.

10

I HAVE only to recall the trip to America to start thinking about the fate of Mikhail Romanovich Galaktionov. Almost every evening at the offices of the *Red Star* I used to meet this quiet man with his old-fashioned courtesy; we greeted one another and occasionally exchanged a few words, but naturally I did not really know what manner of person he was. During our trip to America I had long talks with him and learnt a little about him, but it took me some time to realize the main thing. I often reproach myself for not paying enough attention to other people; it seems to me sometimes that this is not a failing of mine alone but part and parcel of the moral attitude of the times: we know surprisingly little about our neighbours, our colleagues, even our friends; we talk about the fleeting events of the day or argue almost abstractly, but when it comes to things that move us deeply, we say nothing, we go out of our way to conceal our own hearts and just as painstakingly avoid stumbling by accident on what is concealed in the hearts of others.

When the American journalists first saw Galaktionov they labelled him 'old soldier', misled by his grey hair, his tired eyes behind dark-framed glasses and the star on his epaulettes. Before our travels I had always supposed that he was older than I, yet at that time he was not yet fifty. His general's uniform lent him a certain stiffness, he seemed to be starched all over: his cheeks, his words, even his thoughts. And this was quite untrue. When we happened to be alone together, at the time when he was still able to talk composedly, we discussed a whole variety of subjects: Chekhov's masterly art and the terrible fate of our prisoners of war, the productions at the old Solovtsov Theatre in Kiev and the dangers of the mechanization of man. In days long ago Galaktionov had studied philology, then he became a subaltern, but although he volunteered for the Red Army in 1918 and served in it almost the whole of his life, when I was talking to him I was always aware of the leaven of the old intellectual.

At the beginning of our journey not only did I know nothing of Galaktionov's state of mind but I could not altogether understand his

behaviour. I was astonished by his vulnerability to the unceremonious questions of the newspapermen, to the jeers of some brash 'columnist', to every trifle which Simonov and I would not even notice. Gradually I began to understand a little better, but by the time I knew all there was to know it was already too late.

Once, during our first month in America, I went into his room and found him sitting hunched up at a table. I thought he looked unwell but when I inquired, he said: 'I'm all right', and returned my gaze with the eyes of a hunted animal. I said we ought to be starting out for the United Press lunch. He got up, brushed his hair, even smiled and then said suddenly in a low voice: 'Having to meet these foreigners every day . . . It's torture'.

He conscientiously carried out the job he had been given: spoke at meetings and was pleasant and sociable. Although the cold war was gaining strength, the newspapermen behaved far more respectfully towards the general than towards us, the writers. Yet Galaktionov was nervous. At one reception, a prominent military expert said to him: 'I hear that they're preparing a history of the war in your country. We're busy doing the same thing and trying to analyse our setbacks in the Pacific, in Africa, in Italy. Tell me, are your military historians able to analyse unsuccessful operations, like, for instance, the one at Kerch?' Galaktionov replied that during the first year of the war the Germans had had technical superiority. At this the American said with something of a sneer: 'Naturally, in so far as the Red Army was commanded by Generalissimo Stalin strategic mistakes were excluded'.

In New York Simonov and I wandered about the town all day, but Galaktionov never left his room. When there were no official luncheons he had his meals served there. A member of the Trade Delegation brought him books from the library. It was hot, and he would take off his clothes and sit in an armchair reading Chekhov, Turgenev or Leskov. I once found him reading Chekhov. 'A wonderful writer,' he said. 'I must be reading him for the tenth time and my admiration is as great as ever. He can make you see right through a man. Last night when we got back from that damned dinner I read *Ward No. 6*. I know it almost by heart, but when I come to the scene where Nikita gives the doctor that fool's dressing-gown, I can't read any further. There are writers who become the fashion. At one time I was fascinated by Leonid Andreyev. But here, when they brought me a book of his stories, I simply couldn't read them, it all seemed so silly, so

antiquated. Just before you came in I was reading *The Man in a Case*. What I admire is his economy – not a word could be added or taken away. Just listen to this: “Lenten fare was bad for him, yet he could not eat meat”. Or this passage: “You see and hear that they lie . . . and they call you a fool for putting up with their lying. You endure insult and humiliation and dare not openly say that you are on the side of the honest and the free, and you lie and smile yourself . . .” Someone knocked on the door. Galaktionov shut the book quickly.

There is a weight on my conscience: unwittingly I contributed to the aggravation of Galaktionov's sickness. The unbearably hot New York summer had begun, and he went about in his uniform suffering intensely from the heat. It also attracted attention: as soon as he stepped out into the street everybody stared. I persuaded him to buy a summer suit. He felt much better and told me that when he went out for a stroll towards evening nobody so much as glanced at him. He even said laughingly: ‘I expect they took me for an ordinary elderly businessman’. But on the next day I found him in a terrible state. There was a newspaper in front of him and he barely managed to say in a faint voice: ‘Read it. This is the result of your good advice’. I must say that the ‘columnists’ were closely watching our every step: one wrote about how many dollars Simonov had spent on taking an actress out to dinner, another about my buying a box of expensive cigars. And now one of them had produced this gem: ‘The gardens are in flower, the birds are in song, and our formidable General Galaktionov has changed his plumage. We saw him emerge in a light grey suit and set off for . . . we won't say where’. Galaktionov was terribly upset: ‘Do you understand what this means? I went as far as the street corner and back, that's all. But what's the use of talking about it?’ I still did not understand and naively said that his wife was an intelligent woman and even if she saw the newspaper she would only laugh. ‘What's my wife got to do with it?’ he shouted. ‘Just think, what will they say there?’ and he pointed upwards. I tried to calm him: ‘A lot of rubbish has been written about Simonov and me; at home they know about this gutter-press style’. But he would not be calmed: ‘It's all right for you, you're writers, but I'm an army man’. And suddenly he burst out: ‘I've had more than I can bear . . .’ He broke off and quickly began to talk of something else. Later he told me about his youth, the fighting in Samara and Kronstadt, about his meetings with Frunze, but he never returned to his unhappy memories.

Today a great deal is written and even more is said about the victims of the 'personality cult'; people recall those who were shot or who died in the camps. Galaktionov was never arrested; he had only lived in expectation of arrest. Semyon Gudzenko was saved after he had been severely wounded but he died ten years later from the long-term effects of shell-shock. Galaktionov was shocked by the blast of the *yezhozshchina*¹. It is only recently that I learnt what lay behind those unguardedly uttered words: 'I've had more than I can bear'. Galaktionov's service record is very much like that of many others. He joined the party in 1917, when he was twenty, went into the army and to the front, continued his military career, rose in rank, studied at the Military Academy, was seconded to the defence group of the Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars). When the storm broke his colleagues were arrested. Lieutenant-General Galaktionov was accused of being in league with the 'saboteurs'. Books written by 'enemies of the people' were found on his bookshelves. The Party meeting voted unanimously for his expulsion from the Party. He was stripped of his military rank and dismissed from his job. But he was lucky: six months later he was reinstated in the Party and subsequently was asked to work on the *Red Star*. In 1943 someone at top level remembered the existence of this modest and dedicated soldier and Galaktionov was promoted to the rank of major-general, made a member of the editorial board of the *Red Star*, then transferred to *Pravda* and, in due course, sent to America. Everything settled down normally except that the man had been shell-shocked: he remembered that he had been called a coward, a toady and a hypocrite at the Party meeting, and had lived straining his ears at night for the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

The trip to America hastened the outcome. Galaktionov was the last person to carry off the tricky and complicated fencing with American newspapermen under whose surface politeness he could sense the hostility. He found the days in Canada particularly agonizing. I have described the circumstances. His composed behaviour in the presence of strangers impressed me. He felt badgered but never forgot that one must not fan the flames and always replied with his usual dignity, kindness and courtesy. On the boat I told Simonov that I thought Galaktionov was mentally ill.

¹ The period in the thirties when Yezhov was People's Commissar for Home Affairs.

He stayed a week or so in Paris; he brightened up, went round the bookshops, and on one occasion we spent an hour together on a bench in the Jardin du Luxembourg near the Verlaine monument. He spoke about the stones of Europe, about Herzen and the Paris workers, and I thought: it's all right, it'll pass, the man's alive.

In 1947 I met him in the offices of *Pravda*. He looked ill and extremely depressed. I tried to make him laugh by reminding him of how in Washington we used to barge into other people's rooms in the hotel, unaware that though the numbers were right there was a 'W' and an 'E' (for 'west' and 'east'); it had all been rather like something in a bedroom farce. But he did not even smile. On 5th April 1948 Galaktionov committed suicide.

11

I WENT to stay in an hotel on the left bank near the boulevard St Germain. I was given an attic room with a balcony from which I had a view over Paris: its roofs, its chimneys, its old houses crowded together like a blurred grey flock of sheep. Sometimes in the lilac dusk I enjoyed the sight of this familiar picture, at other times I did not so much as notice it.

I heard that Denise had come to Paris for a few days from Annecy where she was living with her son. We went to the café Frégate on the quay where fifteen years ago we had often met. She told me about her life during the occupation years. Her eyes, as in the past, were like those of a sleepwalker. I asked her whether she had been annoyed to find that the actress Jeannette in my novel *The Fall of Paris* resembled her in some respects. 'I was told about it,' she said, 'but I never read it.' Red and green circles flickered on the inky Seine.

The Aragons invited Simonov and me to Le Grenier, as the premises of the National Committee of Writers was called. The memory of the period of occupation – that uniting bond of the war years – was still fresh. I met many people I knew: Paul Eluard, Charles Vildrac, Jean Cassou, Cocteau, Claude Aveline, Louis Martin-Chauffier, Jean Paulhan and Sartre. All the younger people I came across were talking about Sartre who, it was plain, expressed the disquiet of those years. Paris had indeed changed: very few writers mentioned Realism, Surrealism or *Personnalisme*, they talked about the Resistance, about the books published clandestinely and about the general confusion, trying to find like-minded spirits, and many were probably trying to find themselves in the midst of the discordant and contradictory events.

At this point I should like to say something about Aragon, if only briefly. I met him for the first time in 1928 when he was a young Surrealist writer. There was much talk in Montparnasse both about his splendid book *Le Paysan de Paris* and various rowdy demonstrations: in their provocative methods the Surrealists were rather like our Futurists. Aragon was amongst the most militant. Later he subscribed to Realism, joined the Communist Party, founded a number of

organizations and became the editor of a journal and a newspaper. We continued to see each other and at times had very heated arguments. In 1957 Aragon was disgusted by an attack made on me in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (this was after my article on Stendhal) and he wrote a reply in *Les Lettres Françaises* in which he said, among other things: 'I have been in the habit of arguing with Ilya Ehrenburg for thirty years and have said so before. We disagree about everything except the main things: peace and Socialism, war and Fascism'. It is perhaps because in 1946 'the main things' absorbed everyone and I did not even argue much with Aragon, that I devote this particular chapter to him. But by and large he was right: I did not always find him easy to get on with though our arguments never degenerated into a quarrel.

There is no need to dwell on what is common knowledge: he is a fine poet and an important prose writer; some of his books I find congenial, others not. But that is not what I want to talk about here. Aragon has a very complex personality; his values have often shifted but he is justifiably annoyed when people compare one of his 'periods' with another for, fundamentally, he is always himself. He writes with a certain passion, whether classical verse or the description of a character's clothing in a novel. Having once chosen his path he has, ever since the early thirties, sincerely and passionately defended what he calls 'the main things' against all opponents and fought those things to which as a human being he could not reconcile himself. To 'the main things' should be added his love for France; an organic and all-absorbing love, which inspired his poems during the Resistance years and his novel *La Semaine Sainte*. I see him as one of the heirs of Victor Hugo, except that he has no grandchildren, no cosy beard, none of those tranquil adjuncts from which the Olympian derived comfort. Aragon's affinity with Hugo lies in his brilliance, his eloquence, his restlessness, his clarity, his wrath, his romantic realism and realistic romanticism. It goes without saying that, since this is a different century, Aragon is more bitter.

I remember going to see him early in 1963. He asked me about matters which were at the time of deep concern to everyone involved in art and letters. Then we fell silent. I looked at him and saw again the young Surrealist of the Coupole bar. The only difference was that now his hair was white. He had brought a manuscript with him and read me a fiery poem about the tragedy of a Moor who speaks of his faith and of the burden of grief the Koran has laid upon him.

But in 1946, when victory was still fresh, Aragon was joyful.

Lyuba arrived from Moscow and Fotinsky took us to Montparnasse. The people in the café were all strangers. Dusya joined us. She laughed as always though what she had to say was sad: stories of hiding during the occupation and the way people had suddenly disappeared. The Veshnyaks had been sent to Auschwitz, the painter Feder was tortured to death; when Soutine fell ill he was afraid that the doctor might denounce him to the Germans and he died without any medical relief.

André Chamson invited us to his house; he was the curator of the Petit Palais. We wandered about the empty rooms – the museum was officially closed – and I stood for a long time before a painting by Watteau, meditating once more on the power of art. When Watteau was twenty he was regarded as a genre painter; he depicted the calamities of war in the Flemish manner; five years later he found himself: here was the buffoon embodying all the artist's sorrow and the tragedy of an outwardly frivolous century, the professional comedian who had forgotten his role.

We went to see Marquet who showed us his landscapes, smiling at us in his familiar timid way. We discussed what was likely to happen to France, and he kept looking at the river, or perhaps trying to see into the future.

Pierre Cot's windows also overlooked the Seine. One never grows tired of water flowing, changing, and, as one watches it, one can talk about anything: poetry, Bidault, time, and even an isolated moment. Cot expressed the view that the coalition government would be short-lived; that civil war of uncertain outcome was imminent; that France was ruined and only America had any money.

Jan Effel invited us to his home; he made rather wry jokes and showed us his recent caricatures.

Langevin looked ill and had aged a lot; his wonderful eyes had grown still wiser and still sadder. (I did not know that he had only a few more months to live.) 'There have been inhuman things,' he said, 'but perhaps the most inhuman of all is still to come'.

Chantal arrived from Montbard. We tried to recapture our distant youth but broke off at once, and turned to talk of Bonnard's pictures, of London and of the peace conference (in the Palais du Luxembourg – the pre-war Senate – I saw Vyshinsky: discussions were going on about the peace treaty with Italy). Chantal asked me what sort of painting Soviet artists were doing, while I talked about Kastornoye.

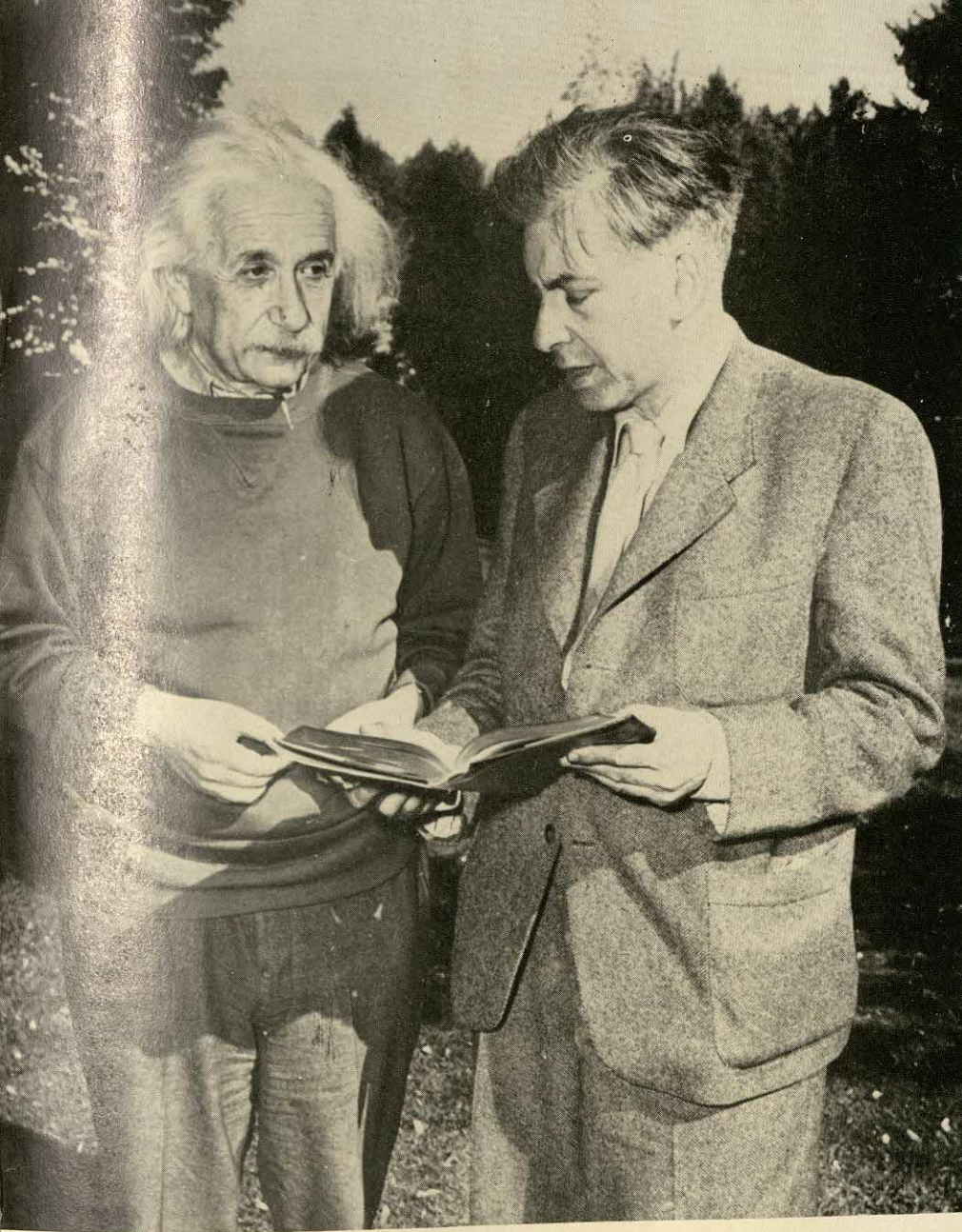
On the quay, just as half a century before, decrepit booksellers sat on their campstools. But Voltaire had disappeared: the Germans had been attracted not by his ironic smile but by the bronze.

I was with people very close to me, very close and at the same time infinitely remote. I knew something which I could not tell them, and they, too, had had experiences during the past six years which could not be recounted either in an hour or a month. Everybody asked me whether Paris had changed; I said no; and, indeed, the city was the same, but now I felt myself a stranger, a passer-by who tries to steal a glimpse at other people's lives through a window. I could no longer, as I had done in the past, take to heart the things that intimately touched and were important to my friends.

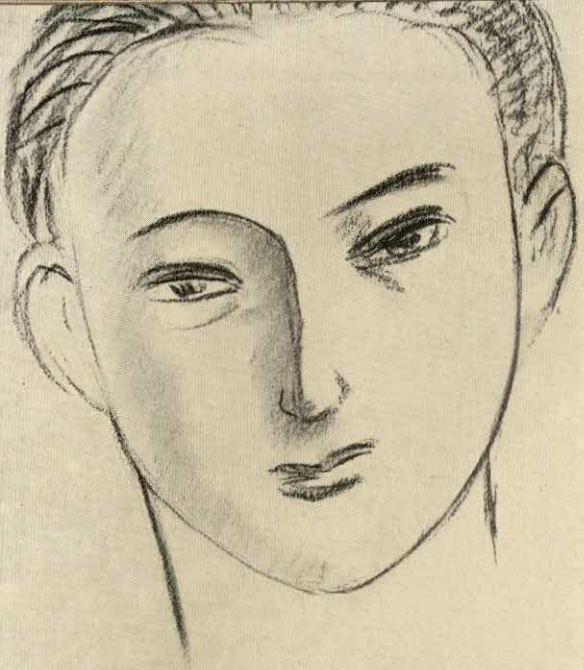
'Paris has changed a lot,' I said to Denise, and immediately corrected myself: 'I suppose it's I who have changed.'

Naturally things were much easier for me in France than in America: the French knew what war meant. (In New York a lady told me that during the war years the Americans had also suffered privations; for example, she had had great difficulty in finding a white shirt for her husband, there were only cream or blue ones to be had.) In France it was difficult to get proper footwear, and in the streets one could hear the clack-clacking of wooden soles; in a town in Brittany, when it started to rain, the girls took off their shoes and pushed them under their mackintoshes. Smart women in Paris went about stockingless and rode bicycles, large shopping bags slung over their shoulders. Expensive shops displayed ceramic brooches, scarves designed by hungry artists, ornaments made of paper, clay or glass. In the wine-growing districts where, before the war, the proprietor of an inn would rinse out the glasses with wine to save himself going over to the tap, workers drank water with their meals. At the fashionable resort of La Baule rich Paris women disported themselves with American officers, but the refugees from ruined St Nazaire huddled near by. In Tours, which had suffered from severe bombing, there were rows of dismal wooden shacks. People said there was no butter, no meat; they were dreading the winter for it was useless to hope for coal. It was all very familiar and easy to understand.

Those who had made their fortune during the occupation had by this time got their second wind, had found powerful friends and now sat in the Champs Elysées sipping apéritifs or sunbathed on the beaches. In Angers I visited the liqueur firm of Monsieur Cointreau



Princeton 1946: Albert Einstein and Ilya Ehrenburg



ILYA EHRENBURG
by Matisse
1910

Ilya Ehrenburg: two drawings by Henry Matisse



who said as he showed me the various processes: 'The Germans appreciated our liqueurs'. I often heard the wealthy wine-growers of Anjou or Touraine say that '1942 was a remarkable year'. They were referring to the quality of the vintage, for no two years are alike. But what I thought of was Rzhev, burnt-out Staritsa, the soldiers' hungry wives. A critic described to me how German officers at First Nights admired the wit of Cocteau, Giraudoux and Salacrou. In Anatole France's old house there was a bold inscription on the wall: '*Hier war der Soldat Klotzke*'.

Only one year had gone by since the end of the war, yet there were many who did not give a thought to the past. The papers printed reports of various shady deals in wine or clothing coupons. Yves Farge was appointed Minister of Food. Meeting me at a demonstration on 14th July he said to me: 'I've been to America too, I was present at the Bikini bomb test, that's where I was when I heard of my appointment. I couldn't very well refuse it. Bikini's a dirty business. I'll try to do something; but there's a lot of dirt here as well, too much altogether'. Farge declared war on the big profiteers who were making a good thing out of wine, meat and bread. He did not keep his post very long – only four months – because the black market bosses proved more powerful.

Everything was mixed up: the former men of Munich, yesterday's collaborators and yesterday's partisans. On the walls of old churches, schools, markets and prisons the word *oui* or *non* was painted, chalked or written in tar: the answers to the referendum.

I have kept a photograph of the platform at a meeting where I spoke and Simonov recited poems. Herriot, Bidault, Thorez, Langevin and the Soviet ambassador Bogomolov are sitting at the long table. Thorez now lived in the Hotel Matignon and once invited us to dine there. A portly concierge looked us up and down in a clearly hostile manner: Thorez might be Deputy Prime Minister but to the concierge he remained as ominous conspirator.

I happened to be in Paris at the time of the referendum. In the course of two years the French people had gone to the polls seven times; many of them were bored with the whole business and the proportion of abstentions was very high. This time de Gaulle was calling for the rejection of the new Constitution. I have discovered an article of mine on France in *Izvestia* of October 1946 in which I said: 'De Gaulle is a man who has been transplanted from the seventeenth

century into the twentieth. At the right moment he realized the importance of motor-cars in war, but the importance of those who make motor-cars escaped him. Perhaps he sees himself as another Maid of Orleans called upon to save France. The very people who a few years ago were shouting that de Gaulle was a traitor, a terrorist, almost a *Communist*, are now shouting: Power to de Gaulle!

The new Constitution was approved by a narrow majority. Pierre Cot had been right: France was split in two. However, this process had begun a long time ago, as far back as the middle thirties; the workers had not been strong enough to seize power but were strong enough to keep the ruling class in a permanent state of apprehension. This uneasy equilibrium largely explains the events of 1938 to 1940. The undercover civil war was still going on in the days I am now describing.

We spent several weeks at Rochefort-sur-Loire where the poet Jean Bouhier, who kept a chemist's shop, gave us hospitality. I could observe how the political situation was reflected in the day-to-day life of a tiny community. Some devout Catholic ladies travelled all the way to Angers for their medicines rather than patronize the local chemist who was known to be a Red. Bouhier stopped me going into one café by saying: 'The proprietor was a collaborator'. Catholic parents forbade their children to play with the children of the godless. The mayor was the same man who had held that office under the Germans; he was a big landowner and vintner: the majority voted for the Right. And the minority openly denounced yesterday's collaborators.

I walked about the countryside. All round were vineyards, meadows, old elms and poplars, islets in the broad Loire and deep August peace. For the first time in many years I relaxed, trying not to think at all. But I had only to stroll into a village, to sit for a while in some dark little café where the peasants sat discussing one thing and another, to become infected by the general *malaise*, by the oppressiveness of the long-gathering storm that had never broken.

In another small place, Vouvray, famous for its wines, which are kept in caves, never cold in winter nor hot in summer, I found that, like France herself, Vouvray was split into almost equal halves. One rich peasant said: 'Why upset things? The Communists aren't peasants, they're newcomers. My wealth was accumulated by the sweat of three generations'. The daughter of a vintner, Bedoir, was a Communist and a candidate for the Constituent Assembly. She had married a Paris

worker. We talked to his old father who said that *his* father had been a Communard. And the Bedoirs' twelve-year-old daughter could give points to the local wine-tasters: she could tell not only the vintage year but whether the vines were grown on the slope or near the cemetery.

In the Limousin I met many who had fought in the Maquis. They took me through the woods, described the fighting and there rose in my mind many of the characters in *The Storm*: Dédé, Micky, the Bear. I heard the song: 'Whistle, comrade, whistle . . .'

I went to Oradour-sur-Glane. The Nazis had rounded up the inhabitants, locked the adults in the church and the children in the school and set fire to all the buildings. Only those people survived who happened to have been working in the fields. On the charred walls one could still see café signs and advertisements for Menier chocolate. At the entrance to the town there was a notice with the word: '*Silence!*' The ruins have become a place of pilgrimage. Near by a new Oradour was being built; the mayor was a Communist.

Marcel Cachin happened to be visiting the village of Eymoutiers when I passed through. They were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the old Communist Fraisiér's political activity. 'When I spoke here forty years ago,' Cachin said, 'only three people came to the meeting. Today there must have been about 2,000'. Afterwards we had lunch sitting on long benches. Cachin said that now that the Soviet Union was victorious it could restore its towns in peace, culture would flourish, the Americans would never dare to attack, western Europe would not stand for it. Then he asked me whether it was true that they had closed the Moscow Museum of Western Art: 'I've been there several times, it's a wonderful collection, especially of our Impressionists'. I knew that Cachin was a great admirer of Signac, whom he knew, and instead of answering his question I started telling him about the recently opened exhibition of pictures stolen by the Nazis and now returned to France; among them were some beautiful Signac landscapes.

In the Dordogne half-ruined châteaux were going cheap. The artist Lurçat, a Communist, had bought the ruins of a medieval tower. He told me that when he settled in the village the mayor greeted him with: 'It's a good thing you've come here, comrade *châtelain*, because we're just starting to form a Party organization'.

My rest did not last long. *Izvestia* was pressing me to send them articles on America and France. The Franco-Soviet Friendship Society

wanted me to tour the country. I spoke at big meetings in Lyons, St Etienne and Limoges. I had to be on my feet at various receptions in Town Halls, at branches of the Friendship Society, at gatherings of journalists, to broadcast and to answer hundreds of questions. In Limoges I spent the night in the State suite where visiting Ministers usually slept. In Lyons the author of *Clochemerle*, Gabriel Chevalier, wanted me to explain why Zoshchenko was considered dangerous. The sculptor Salandre wanted information about the monuments. Geoffre, an ex-pilot of the *Normandie* squadron, came to Lyons and gave me a chance to rest while we chatted, recalling Minsk, General Zakharov and the Soviet mechanics; everything seemed to fall into place: courage, the graves of the dead and old friendship.

The brittle anti-Hitler coalition was still officially intact. I often heard the phrase 'cemented with blood' and this was said to be the strongest of all bonds. People always tend to believe the best, but history only too often ignores both logic and what we call conscience.

I attended the peace conference at the Palais du Luxembourg several times. It was proceeding in a far from peaceful manner. The erstwhile allies accused one another of perfidy. Evatt, the Australian delegate, was particularly violent. He soon became a star turn for the reporters, who knew that he had only to take the floor for a row to blow up, and in the press canteen cups of coffee would be left half finished if anyone said: 'Evatt's just due to speak'.

I felt the impact of the cold war on myself. When I had stopped briefly in Paris on my way to America, the press referred to me kindly, or at any rate civilly. That was in early spring. Now, in late summer and autumn, a number of papers began to slander me. One of them contended that I had been bought: I had a ten-roomed flat in Moscow and a villa in the Crimea as well as a shooting-lodge in Byelorussia. Another said that I was abusing France's traditional hospitality, that I was out to set the French at loggerheads with the Americans, that since I claimed that the Negroes in the USA were denied liberty a monument might be erected to me in Black Africa, but I had better leave France. A third paper, suddenly recollecting the dim past, demanded that I should return 'the money stolen from them' to the French holders of tsarist bonds. In Lyons newsboys, eager to speed the sale of the local evening paper, shouted lustily 'Moscow preparing to occupy France!' In Nantes some juveniles broke into and robbed a smart restaurant, and a local paper announced that Russian-French dictionaries had

been found in the possession of the young delinquents. At the next interview with the press I was slyly asked if I had been visiting Nantes recently.

The Communist Party was the strongest in France. The uneasy equilibrium was maintained: the cold war was carried on in every French town. Pierre Cot kept saying: 'The outcome is uncertain'. No one needlessly looks on the black side and I hoped that things would turn out all right. It was a lovely autumn; in October roses were still in bloom. People smiled, for the French are resilient and easily solaced by fine weather or a joke or the sight of a pretty woman passing in the street.

I dropped in to see Jean-Richard Bloch at the offices of *Ce Soir*. He suggested going to a neighbouring café for a glass of wine. There he expounded his hopes: it was his belief that the Socialists would find it impossible to break with the Communists, and that these two Parties, who represented a majority both in the Chamber and in the country, would win the day.

12

IN THE Aragons' familiar tiny flat in the rue de la Sourdière there were some lovely drawings by Matisse. Aragon told me that in 1942 he had seen a lot of Matisse in Nice where the artist had settled permanently, but that now he was in Paris working on cartoons for tapestries. Aragon also said that in 1941 Matisse had undergone a major operation for partial gastrectomy and was now obliged to work in bed; he was able to get up for only a few hours and had to wear a special contraption.

In September Aragon said that Matisse wanted me to sit for him. The house where he was living was practically across the street from the Hotel Nice where I had spent so much of my youth. On the walls of an ordinary bedroom he had hung sheets of cardboard with pieces of coloured paper pinned to them. The artist's face was very familiar to me from photographs, but when he took off his glasses I was surprised by his clear blue eyes.

I had been a callow youth when I met Picasso, Léger and Modigliani, and they themselves were only eight or ten years older than I. In those days I had gazed with admiration at Matisse's paintings, but I was meeting the artist himself for the first time now when he was seventy-seven years old.

He had been a late starter. At the age of fourteen Picasso was already drawing like a fully fledged artist; but Matisse studied law and worked in a notary's office. When he was twenty he had his appendix out and during his convalescence, out of sheer boredom, he began to copy pictures. Masaccio, the great master of the Renaissance, died at the age of twenty-seven, which was the same age at which Raphael finished his famous *stanze*. Picasso, before he was twenty-seven, had painted the pictures of his blue period and his pink period, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and had arrived at Cubism. But had Matisse died at twenty-seven he would have left behind only a beginner's promising work.

I sat for Matisse three times. During the first sitting he said: 'When they were taking me to the operating theatre I mentally said goodbye to life. It was a miracle - I've been granted a new lease of life. An

extension, you might say. And, you know, it's made me enjoy everything more keenly than before: people, trees, colours'.

Cardboard discs with a black circle in the middle punctured by bullet-holes hung over the bed. Matisse explained that he sometimes went to a shooting gallery, though it was not easy for him: 'In my profession it's all-important to preserve a good eye and a steady hand. I test myself from time to time'.

In the course of the sittings he made, if my memory serves me correctly, some fifteen sketches; two he gave me, and under what looked like the handsome face of a young man he wrote: '*D'après Ehrenburg*'. I hardly know whether to call these sketches portraits. He said he could neither paint nor draw except from nature. While he was drawing he observed my face closely. All the sketches had something in common: 'That's how I see you'. On one occasion, after showing me the drawing, he said: 'This is a head, eyes, a mouth, plus whatever it is that I know about you'. As he worked he talked, or rather put questions to make me talk: 'It doesn't disturb me, it helps'. And he also talked quite a lot while resting between sketches. At the end of the last sitting he said he now knew my face, and knew me, too, but immediately corrected himself: 'It would be more true to say that I *see* and *feel*'. When I asked him why he needed models, he said: 'I've been learning all my life and now I'm learning to decipher nature's hieroglyphics'.

I was struck by the sureness of his touch; his hand never faltered. (Later I saw a documentary film about him, part of which was in slow motion so that one could see with what precision he drew a line.) I told him that I was amazed at the economy of his drawing. He shook his head: 'In the course of sixty years I'm bound to have learnt something. But not everything by any means. I remember reading a book on Hokusai who lived to be ninety and who shortly before his death told his pupils that he was still learning. I don't feel any self-assurance at all. In the past poets used to talk about inspiration, but what we say is: "today's a good day for working". It's bound up with one's inner state: you sometimes feel, which means that you see, but it doesn't always work out. You've no idea how many drawings I've destroyed, how many times I've overpainted a wretched picture'.

During the last sitting he enlarged on art. He asked the young woman, Lydia Delektorskaya, who helped him with his cartoon work, to bring him the elephant. It was a wooden Negro sculpture – and a very expressive one – of an enraged elephant. 'Do you like it?' Matisse

asked. I said that I did, very much. 'There's nothing about it that disturbs you?' 'No'. 'Nor me. But then a European, a missionary came and began to teach the Negro: "Why are the elephant's tusks turned upwards? An elephant can raise his trunk, but the tusks are teeth, they can't move". And the Negro followed his advice.' He called out again: 'Lydia, please, bring me the other elephant'. With a quizzical smile he showed me a small figure like those sold in department stores all over Europe: 'The tusks are in their proper place. But the art is nowhere at all'.

It was on that occasion that he talked at length about the sources of modern painting: 'Aragon thinks it all began with Courbet. Maybe. But maybe later, with Manet. Or perhaps much earlier. That's not the point. Do you know to whom modern painting owes a very great deal? To Daguerre, to Niepce. With the invention of photography the need for descriptive painting vanished. No matter how objective the artist tries to be, he can't beat the camera. To know what Ingres looked like I have to see his self-portrait, portraits of him by David and other artists, none of which is quite like any of the others, and still I don't know the shape of his mouth. But I know Hugo from daguerreotypes, from photographs. A painter's eye and hand are subject to his emotions. I've studied anatomy; if I wanted to know what different breeds of elephants were like, I should get photographs. But we as artists know that tusks may rise'.

He was a heavy smoker, and his bed was strewn with packets of different brands of cigarettes – French, Egyptian, English. 'The liquid food I have to take is insipid and means nothing to my palate. The different taste of cigarettes is the one sensual pleasure they've left me. First I smoke one sort and then another. And my eyes too. Never before have I taken so much pleasure in a flower or a beautiful woman'.

My last visit to him was on 8th October. He was cutting out arabesques for a tapestry. The scissors traced the lines with the same precision as charcoal or pencil. The cartoons for two 'Polynesia' tapestries were almost completed. Much later I saw a picture of his composed of coloured paper, for he could no longer sit at an easel and ideas for painting haunted him. He died at the age of eighty-five and was working till the very end. He had turned a physical disability into a new potentiality and when you look at his *papiers découpés* you forget the man chained to his bed and see the wings of creative imagination.

Matisse wanted to know all about Moscow. 'I was there exactly

thirty-five years ago, in October 1911. Shchukin invited me. I didn't stay long. I saw Rublev's work. It's probably the most important in world painting. In Moscow I realized and felt certain things. I don't understand much about politics but I don't conceal my sympathy for your country. Design is as certainly needed in the organization of society as in the composition of a picture. It's astonishing that the Russians should have been the first to grasp this, because when I was in Moscow it seemed to me that in their day-to-day life the Russians loved disorder'.

(Matisse had always stood aloof from politics. However, after the cold war started he began to feel that some politicians in the west had gone out of their minds and that peace was in danger. In 1947 I wrote an article for *Literaturnaya Gazeta* about the struggle for peace in which I said: 'It is no accident that among the Communists and the friends of the USSR we find the greatest scientists of France – the late Paul Langevin and Joliot-Curie – her greatest painters – Picasso and Matisse – and her greatest poets – Aragon and Eluard'. Aragon was sent a translation of this article and published it in *Les Lettres Françaises*. Some days later a copy of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* reached Paris and the anti-Soviet press commented with malicious joy: 'The editors of the Russian journal think it improper that Comrade Ilya Ehrenburg should make no mention of the formalistic and decadent trend of Picasso's and Matisse's creative work'. Friends told me that when Matisse read about this he laughed. In 1947 he sent greetings to the Wroclaw Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace and in 1950 he signed the Stockholm Appeal.)

I have seldom met anyone who both in appearance and in outlook was so thoroughly French as Matisse. Above all he loved clarity. Of course, from the point of view of a painter who is out to emulate the photographer, his work teems with distortions, though to me it seems not only realistic but as though lit up from within by the spirit of an hereditary Cartesian.

He talked to me about the great Russian art-collectors: 'Shchukin began to buy my things in 1906. At that time very few people recognized me in France: Gertrude Stein, Sembat and I think that's about all. They say there are painters whose eyes never make mistakes. Shchukin had eyes of that kind, although he was a merchant and not an artist at all. He always picked out the best. Sometimes I didn't feel like parting with a particular canvas and would say: "This hasn't

turned out well, I'll show you some other things". He would look at them all and say at the end: "I'll take the one that didn't turn out so well". Morozov was much more easy-going; he took everything the painters offered him. I've been told that in Moscow you now have a marvellous gallery of modern art'.

'Lydia, bring me Shchukin's portrait.' It was a splendid painting in the early Matisse manner. He said: 'I've had many offers for it but I won't sell. In my opinion its place is in the Museum of Western Art. If it's not too much trouble, take it with you and present it to the gallery as a gift from me'. I knew that the Museum of Western Art was closed and that all Matisse's pictures were stowed away. What was I to do with it? I said I would take the portrait on my next visit. I would certainly be coming to Paris again soon. Later I reproached myself: I ought to have taken it and kept it at home, and by now it would have been hanging in the Hermitage or in the Pushkin Museum. But these are the kind of thoughts that the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier* and of which the Russians say 'strong in hindsight'.

In the course of one conversation Matisse mentioned that during the war years he had illustrated Ronsard. I told him how in East Prussia I had found a first edition of Ronsard and also how heart-rending it had been to read about joy among graves and ruins. 'I understand what you mean,' said Matisse. 'I think a poet's very much the same as a painter. And painting thrives on love of life, delight in life and on nothing else. An artist can have genius but if he's at odds with life, he may make people argue with him, even admire him, but he'll bring happiness to no one.'

Matisse was born in the north of France but spent almost forty years living and working in Nice where he died: he had fallen in love with the south. He painted young women in bright dresses and gaily patterned shawls; he painted palm-trees, anemones, birds, goldfish, cacti, green shutters, seashells, oranges, odd-shaped gourds, the sea, great jars, the sky, dances; he knew the earthly happiness of the flesh and was able to communicate it to others. And when by a stroke of luck I met the creator of this life-loving, radiant world, I found an old man who, in the grip of a crushing disease, went on working wisely and – I use the word without fear of shocking – gaily.

For me, at the time, the evening of life had only just set in and my meeting with Matisse was both a joy and a lesson.

13

IN THIS last part of my memoirs I am keeping to the chronological order of events even less strictly than in previous volumes. It would be pointless to describe matters that are fresh in everyone's minds. The Moscow of my childhood days, the Paris of the Rotonde and the cafés where the *nichevoki*¹ announced the end of the world, are things not known to the majority of my readers, but there is hardly any purpose in recounting the episodes of the cold war or describing the various Peace Congresses. Besides, it is high time, now that I have reached the post-war years, to make some attempt to interpret our epoch and my own self. Yet I find that to explain all I have seen and lived through is beyond my powers. It would be gratifying, of course, to appear in the reader's eyes as someone who has climbed to the top of the hill from where everything is viewed as in the palm of one's hand. But I must be truthful. More than once I have referred to the bad mistakes I made as I peered into the future, not in itself a surprising fact since I make no claims as a prophet or a seer. But I must confess now that as I reflect on my past life I realize how very little I know and, most important of all, that even what I *do* know I am far from understanding completely.

The closer events are to me, the more often I break off short. When, in one of the earlier chapters of these memoirs, I said that I should lift the curtain of the confessional less and less frequently I had my private life in mind and wanted to give warning that, though it was easy enough to talk about a schoolboy's first love, I was not going to trace the adult 'vagaries of the heart'. However, in this last volume it is not only the curtain of the confessional that falls now and again but the curtain of the whole theatre on whose stage the tragedy of my friends, my contemporaries and my compatriots was being played.

There was a time when I was always the youngest present; of all the people described in the earlier parts of my memoirs very few are still living. In the post-war years there were not many occasions when I did not find myself the oldest, and almost all the people I met in this

¹ Lit. 'nothingists' – something like beatniks of the time.

period are alive today. And when it comes to the events, a writer has his own inner censorship which reaches for the scissors not only if the narrative concerns people, but also if it deals with certain happenings that history might have been expected to bring out into the open. After all, I do not think of myself as a retired citizen, a hermit or even an acquiescent pensioner. In describing the past I defend my present ideas and try to build a bridge into the future. Naturally I have ill-wishers, though I do not give them too much thought. But the Soviet people, whose concepts I cherish, has enemies in plenty and these I cannot contemplate as though from another planet or out of another century: the battle is still being waged. And this, too, compels me to omit certain details; but when it comes to the most important things of all I do not want to nor can I remain silent. Lastly, I am restricted by the knowledge that a line has to be drawn somewhere: I must finish the book and so must try to sum things up. It is my intention to take the story up to the point when I wrote *The Thaw*. 'The last tale'¹ will therefore not be told, for I am not Pimen the Monk and my memoirs are anything but a dispassionate chronicle. However patchy the story of my experiences in the post-war years may seem, however disjointed the picture and fragmentary the thoughts, I believe that the reader will find in my rather incoherent narrative something more in the nature of a confession than a sermon.

On returning to Moscow I once again took up *The Storm* and finished it in the autumn of 1947. I wrote from morning till night, in a hurry, although I knew that it was precisely this work on the novel that acted as a barrier to bitter thoughts and that it would be a long time before I should have another opportunity to write a book. And that is just what happened. But if it had taken me a long time to make up my mind to start on the novel, once it was finished it took me longer still to shake off its characters. I went on talking to them in my thoughts, and not only because it is always painful for a writer to part from those characters of whom he has grown fond, but also because the memory of the war actually helped me to reconcile myself to what was going on around me.

Sometimes in the evening I listened to the radio, to Moscow and Paris. While I had been writing *The Storm* the world had had time to change. My journey abroad seemed a far-off pastoral. In France the

¹ From Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*.

workers' mass strikes had been defeated, the police had opened fire on demonstrators. In America the extreme elements had gained the upper hand. I heard new expressions: 'the Marshall Plan', 'the Truman Doctrine', 'preventive war'. It was incredible and frightening: less than three years had passed since the common victory; people were still close to the bombardments, the air raids, the cruel times they had endured. I listened to pseudo-scientific talks on the radio about the necessity of 'defending western culture against Soviet expansionism'; I listened and was filled with rage. One well-known French writer, a Gaullist, proclaimed an 'Atlantic culture', and his discovery coincided with the setting up of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. All this was strongly reminiscent of the Nazis' pronouncements on the superior culture of the 'Nordic race'.

In the articles I wrote in reply to the war propaganda of the West I was sometimes able to remind people of certain fairly elementary truths which in those years were often stifled. In August 1947 I wrote: 'Culture cannot be divided into zones, like cutting a cake into slices. To speak of western European culture as separate from the Russian, or of Russian culture as separate from the western European is, to put it plainly, a sign of ignorance. When we talk of the role Russia has played in the intellectual life of Europe, it is not in any way intended to belittle other nations. Only dwarfs use stilts, and the people who shout about their national superiority are those who are not quite sure of themselves.

'Since the most ancient times a deep affinity has existed between the artists and thinkers of different countries, each contributing to the wealth and variety of culture. We have learnt from others and others have learnt from us. No reminder is needed of the fact that modern European and American literature is unthinkable without the classical Russian novel, or that modern art is unthinkable without the work of the nineteenth-century French painters. A hundred years ago Belinsky wrote that European nations "mercilessly borrow from one another without fear of damage to their nationhood. History tells us that this danger is real only for nations that are powerless and insignificant".'

Western newspapers called me 'an irresponsible swindler' and 'a quick-witted cynic' (familiar words). But I felt pretty sick at heart.

Simonov, of whom I saw a good deal in those days, told me that Stalin attached great importance to the struggle against 'obsequiousness to the West'. The campaign spread. As had often happened before,

certain ideas, not unreasonable in themselves, were laboured to the point of absurdity. Exaggerated admiration for everything foreign had been satirized as long ago as the eighteenth century by Fonvizin, for it is, indeed, an old disease: people admired German technology and had a saying that 'the Germans had made the moon', but at the same time constantly boasted that 'the Russians made it hot for the Germans'. Since my childhood I have seen humility and arrogance so closely interwoven that it was hard to tell where the one ended and the other began. Often, listening to the naive eulogies of our tourists who found themselves abroad for the first time, I was reminded of Madame de Kurdukov¹, the comic character created by Myatlev. An inferiority complex gave rise to a superiority complex. One could find in the same newspaper the vainglorious assertion that our agronomy was the finest in the world and an item basking in some Dutch businessman's commendation of our ballet.

It is enough to dip into the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, or more exactly into the volumes which appeared before 1954, to see to what distortions the campaign against 'obsequiousness to the West' could lead: the achievements of foreign scientists were hardly mentioned. The history of art fared no better. Even minor executives, eager to prove their zeal, renamed camembert 'snack-cheese'.

This incited some people in the West to facile, sometimes ill-founded derision. One well-known novelist indulged in heavy irony at the expense of the Russians for vaunting the merits of a completely unknown radio-technician called Popov. (Today the *Petit Larousse Illustré* states: 'Wireless telegraphy was invented in 1895 by Popov (Russia) and Marconi (Italy)'.) In the National Assembly Bidault said jeeringly: 'We are being told that great discoveries were made by a certain Lomonosov'. I replied in *Pravda*: 'I loathe nationalism, I cannot bear people who insult the culture of another nation. When I express my indignation at the behaviour of M. Bidault, I am defending the respect due not only to Lomonosov, but also to Lavoisier. Great men remain great regardless of what a certain Bidault may say about them'.

On his return from America Simonov wrote a novel called *Dym Otechestva* (Smoke of the Fatherland) in which he contrasted the well-fed and self-satisfied Americans with the spiritually rich inhabitants

¹ Figure in a satire on French affectations.

of the Smolensk region. In the discussion on this novel Fedin and I stressed its merits. Stalin took an altogether different view. I do not know what annoyed him, whether it was that Simonov had an opinion of his own or the title of the book, but *Kultura i Zhizn* (Culture and Life) abused *Smoke of the Fatherland*, and, while it was about it, Fedin and myself.

When one of my French friends wrote me a letter inquiring anxiously about my health, I did not immediately understand why; later a batch of cuttings sent on by our embassy provided the clue: anti-Soviet newspapers had triumphantly announced 'fresh havoc wrought among Soviet writers'; one of them went so far as to say: 'it would be interesting to know whether Ehrenburg will get off with exile to Siberia or if it is the noose that awaits him'.

The latest victim was the young writer Kazakevich who had recently received a prize for his novel *Zvezda* (The Star). He had written a second novel called *Dva v Step'i* (Two in the Steppe) describing how, during the terrible days of the retreat, a young officer, under fire for the first time, loses his head and fails to carry out an order for which he is sentenced to be shot. A soldier of Kazakh nationality is detailed to guard him. As the retreat continues, the Kazakh and the condemned man have to work their way through to the east. Prisoner and guard become friendly. The characters in the novel are well realized and the way these two gradually draw closer to one another is sensitively described. I considered (and still do) *Two in the Steppe* one of the best books about the war. I said as much at the same meeting and I have kept the letter Kazakevich wrote to me: 'I am deeply touched by your consideration and proud of your high opinion of my second book'. Kazakevich bore all attacks with fortitude. He was an unassuming, mild man but he had great courage; he set more store by his convictions than by success and never traded his desire to serve the people for servility.

Death takes even less account of logic than does history; too often its scythe sweeps over a green, unripened crop. Kazakevich came back safely from the war, although he served in reconnaissance and risked his life over and over again. He was full of vitality, was working on a new book and seemed to be in robust health, yet he died before he was fifty.

In 1949 we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the poet Stepan Shchipachev. I said I should like to pay my tribute to him. I like the

poet's short, unpretentious poems, and I find the man himself congenial, with his honesty, simplicity and directness. In my brief speech I said that Shchipachev had succeeded in safeguarding his poetry 'from verbal inflation'. This was said at a writer's meeting and with restraint, yet many of those present took my words as a challenge: evidently the brand of false rhetoric marked more than one brow. Later on I had a number of talks with Shchipachev and my impression of him was confirmed. Tall and straight, he is physically like his own poetry and he has a noble spirit. At difficult moments I would suddenly think of him and it renewed my trust in life.

So long as I was writing *The Storm* the work helped me. But once it was finished I felt compelled to resort to the old drug: trains shrieking through the night, rough pitted roads, nights spent anywhere, confidences at wayside halts, unfinished conversation, faces lost in the fog, the kaleidoscope of travel. For eighteen months I was perpetually on the go. Here is a list of the places I visited, taken from my notebook: Orsha – Minsk – Vilnius – Kaunas – Klaipeda; Šiauliai – Palanga – Liēpaja – Jelgava – Riga – Tartu – Tallin – Narva – Leningrad – Novgorod – Valday; Kalinin – Kashin – Kaliazin; Warsaw – Wrocław – Łódź; Kiev – Pogor – Briansk; Vladimir – Suzdal – Ivanovo; Tula – Orel; Penza – Belinsky; Leningrad – Tallin; Warsaw – Wrocław – Kielce – Krakow; Kishinev – Bel'tsy – Soroki – Falesti – Bendery – Bolgrad – Kiliya – Izmail.

Memories of these journeys are like short film-clips joined at random. I went to Ivanovo to try to do something about the position of N. N. Ivanov, a former chargé d'affaires in Paris, who had been set free but was not yet rehabilitated, and who was now working as a supernumerary in the Society for the Dissemination of Political Knowledge.

A lecture had been arranged in some village where I was to talk about my trip to America; at the most dramatic moment a cow walked into the barn where my audience sat. In Pogor I had been invited to describe how cigars were made in the west; there was some sampling; I had brought a havana with me but it was not appreciated. I came across many interesting things, both good and bad; huge factories and impassable roads, the glories of ancient Suzdal, the works of the Estonian painter Adamson, the ruins of Novgorod, the markets of Moldavia. It would be impossible to describe all these journeyings but my trip to the Penza region is worth a word.

The hundredth anniversary of Belinsky's death was being celebrated and I was included in a delegation of writers, led by Fadeyev, going to Chembar, Belinsky's birthplace.

The memorial to Belinsky was unveiled in Penza, Fadeyev made a speech. There was nothing remarkable to see in Penza but I took an immediate liking to the town. In the old part the shabby façades of houses that had once been occupied by single families and where now every corner was let and sublet, looked depressing. I liked the people: they seemed in some way less distracted than the citizens of bustling Moscow, they seemed to read more and to think more. One student who showed me round the local park recited by heart whole pages of Saltykov-Shchedrin. A young woman who had studied in Leningrad took me into the storage-rooms of the museum and spoke enthusiastically about Korovin, about the 'Jack of Diamonds' group and about Cézanne, and recalled the pictures in reserve at the Hermitage. At a meeting with students there were lively discussions about Kazakevich, Nekrassov and Panova; someone recited Pasternak's poems. A worker from the watch factory came to see me at the hotel and immediately started talking about art: 'When I listen to serious music, time seems to disintegrate, or perhaps the other way round: a thousand years seem to be condensed into an hour, so that when it's over you feel as if you'd lived several lives'.

Everywhere the new and the old were juxtaposed. In Lermontovo (Tarkhany) the collective farmers lived reasonably well for those days. In the village there was a ten-year school. Sitting by the pond I heard boys shouting to each other in unintelligible words. I talked to them and found that they were quarrelling in French. I wanted to meet the French teacher but when he learnt this he went off into the forest.

The history teacher O. S. Vyrypayeva, on being told that I was interested in ceramics, took me to the neighbouring village of Yazykovo where the collective farmers had from time immemorial made pottery. The villagers were living in chimneyless, smoke-blackened huts. The rumour had got about that Voroshilov was coming for the Belinsky celebrations and I was taken for one of his suite. People crowded into the hut where I was and, interrupting one another, voiced their grievances: they had to pay taxes on all the jugs and pots they sent to market, and on the way to Chembar half the goods got broken. I listened and took notes, but in the end I began to feel uneasy: I was

behaving like Khlestakov¹, for they all kept saying: 'You tell Stalin'. I explained that I was only a writer, that I would try to help but was not certain that I could. A demobilized soldier with feverish eyes was sitting on the stove, coughing. He had been silent but now he said: 'A writer . . . He'll describe it all right – every hut a palace, every pot a va-ase'. He went on for a long time coughing and repeating like a swear-word: 'va-ase'. We went out. The teacher, who was keenly interested in literature, said helplessly: 'To think that this is 1947! It's a disgrace!' But I was thinking: maybe the soldier's right.

(A year later I travelled with Lidin to the Penza and Tambov regions and once again came across curious contrasts. The museum in Tambov was surprisingly rich – among other things it had a fine Donatello – and there was an excellent public library. But the museum in the regional capital Kirsanov made us laugh: in one room there was a sagging sofa, an armchair and a cracked vase with an explanatory notice: 'Illustration of the Life and Interior of Princess Obolensky'. Another room contained a nondescript piece of sculpture labelled: 'Freely Conceived Bust by Unknown Master'. We drove out to Poima to visit the writer A. P. Anisimova, a great lover of folk art. She took me to Nevezhkino where Russian embroidery was still done by experts. We found ramshackle huts; the school building was dilapidated, everything looked derelict. And on the next day we were invited to the nearby Lenin collective farm for the opening of a book-shop. The houses there were of the city type and there was a library and a crèche. It was difficult to believe that Nevezhkino was next door.)

In 1947 I visited for the first time many places associated with Russian literature of the nineteenth century. I went to Yasnaya Polyana where Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*; but inside the house it is not Tolstoy the writer you sense but the old man full of spiritual unrest, instructing Tolstoyians at the tea-table, the Tolstoy who had ploughed the fields with 'humility greater than pride', and whose last wish was to be buried in a nameless grave, without even a tombstone. I think it was his grave that moved me most deeply: he had chosen a spot where he would be in close community with the only partner worthy of him – Nature. I went to Spasskoye under whose shady maples Turgenev wrote his novels until late in the autumn when he would depart for Paris. On one occasion he was

¹ The impostor hero of Gogol's *The Inspector General*.

refused a foreign passport and had a small wing built on to the house, writing to Pauline Viardot to say that he was living like an exile in Siberia. In Orel I saw his sofa and his books with his own notes in the margins. I also visited Leskov's house. I stood for a moment by Fer's neglected grave. In Chembar I saw the school where Belinsky had been a pupil. It is difficult to say why in a gallery some particular picture moves one very deeply; in the same way I cannot explain why it is that the days spent in Tarkhany, or to give the place its new name, the village of Lermontovo, made the greatest impression on me.

It was there that I met V. A. Daryevskaya, a young teacher of Russian literature who asked me what sort of man Mayakovsky had been, whether I liked Bagritsky's poetry and where she could get a good translation of Heine. I learnt from her something about the school and the village life. She was a modest girl who loved her work and was interested in art; she told me that sometimes she managed to get to Penza on a Sunday and go to the theatre. It was over sixteen miles to the railway station and sometimes she had to walk all the way back. On one occasion in winter there were some wolves which at first she had taken for dogs, but the wolves came right up to the village and killed the *kolkhoz* sheep: 'I was terrified'.

We went into the vault to see the coffin in which Lermontov's body had been brought from Pyatigorsk. The vault was damp and water dripped loudly on to the coffin lid.

The exhibits in the museum were a mixed lot: a few of the poet's belongings and various diagrams and posters relating to the serfdom of the peasants, the Revolution and the achievements of the collective farmers of the Penza region. In one room I found Lermontov's pipe and his illustrations to his poem *The Demon*; in another hung a large portrait of Stalin.

That night I wrote a poem. It has never been published but I quote it here because it is a scrap of the promised confession: 'Tarkhany is not a poem, it is a large solid village. The insane Demon has long since presented his wing to the museum. And the visitor sees a fragile, toylike, lightless world, a pipe gnawed in anguish and a musical-comedy uniform. Everyone feels rather proud that this should be Lermontov's armchair. On the walls hang numerous texts about the changes that have taken place. And under the window is an overgrown garden with "good luck" concealed in the lilac¹. Machines have lightened

¹ A lilac floret with five or more petals is supposed to bring good luck.

labour. There is a ten-year school in the village. The collective farmers dutifully revere the deeds of their glorious ancestor and every year, on that July day when the bullet laid him low, there is a festival in Tarkhany. From early morning the children are dressed in their best. Arches are swathed in red bunting; the rye has already been delivered to the government, and in the old Lermontov park young people are gaily dancing. There is no stamping and whistling here¹. The distant shot has long been forgotten, only in the chill vault stands a zinc-covered coffin. The engine has stopped, the driver tinkers with it. And a young girl in the hut mumbles the same favourite verse, with passion in her unseeing eyes, her eyebrows raised at sharp angles. The night, as long ago, is dark. People drink and sing. Recite verses. Swear. But the heart knocks at the zinc. Everything has been drunk – to the last drop. "I love my country but with a strange love . . ." Yet why should it seem strange? It is our one and only'.

Of course I love my country and not merely because it is my one and only; I love it also because a descendant of a Scottish mercenary wrote *A Hero of Our Time* which makes me gape with wonder whenever I reread it; I love it because the collective farm women of Lermontovo, valiant, exhausted and proud soldiers' wives, ploughed with cows and quietly wept over the small triangles of letters from the front; I love it for the gentle placidity of the landscape in Tarkhany, for all those hillocks and copses and ponds, for the bold conceptions of the people, for the girl Vera who recited in the dark 'There are words whose meaning is mysterious or trivial'², who went to see *Hamlet* and met with wolves; I love it because the 'frantic Vissarion', dedicated equally to justice and to beauty, had grown up in obscure Chembar, because in Penza the young Meyerhold dreamt about a show-booth, because in the Penza region there are villages with extraordinary names like Volchiy Vrag, Sosedka, Verkhozim, Shemysheyka; I love it for the flowery style of its swearing and the demureness of its caresses, for a thousand other things, great and small, which I can best express in the simple phrase: it is our one and only.

¹ From Lermontov's poem *My Country*.

² From a poem by Lermontov (without title).

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IN OCTOBER 1947 Fadeyev told me that I should have to go to Poland on a delegation of writers, the others being Tvardovsky, Pavlo Tychina and Brovka. He started briefing me and then broke off with a laugh: 'I don't need to tell you. You've spent half your life abroad'. What I did not say but thought was that living in a country and going there on a delegation were two very different things.

On the train I found myself in the same compartment as Tychina who was at the time the Ukrainian Minister of Education. We had a long argument about who should settle where, for each of us wanted to spare the other climbing to the upper bunk. Tychina and I had been born not only in the same year but on the same day. I said that he, as a Minister, should take the lower berth but he did not agree. I went out into the corridor and got talking with Tvardovsky. On my return I found that Tychina had taken advantage of my absence to install himself at the top. We chatted amicably for a while and then put out the light. I was already on the brink of sleep when Tychina suddenly said: 'There's bound to be a *pomyłka*'. Although I was born in Kiev I had spent my childhood in Moscow and there were many Ukrainian words I did not know. It was later explained to me that *pomyłka* means a 'bloomer', but it sounds very much like the Russian word for 'soaping' which means a slating and, being half asleep, I took it that we were in for one: it was my second trip abroad as a member of a delegation and I was slightly apprehensive.

The sight of Tuwim at the station immediately set my mind at rest. The Poles gave us a warm welcome. This was, I realized, a Poland very different from the one I had known twenty years ago at the time of the Pilsudski police regime. In those days not only the authorities but some of the writers, too, had been guarded in their conversations with me.

Of course Poland had changed very much, yet there was a great deal that was familiar, for it is not the character of a nation but its life that changes. I did not recognize the streets but I recognized the

people. Of those whom I used to know many were gone: among the dead were some famous men and others known only to their friends. In 1928 I had met the writer Żeleński-Boy. We had spent a whole night discussing Montaigne and Proust. He knew far more than I did and talked passionately, sometimes scathingly, but with a disarming love of art. He was sixty-seven when the fascist boors shot him in Lvov. In Paris, during the thirties, I used to meet the young architect Senior in Montparnasse. His ambition was to build something lasting, he was a great admirer of Le Corbusier; although he lived in extreme poverty, whenever his mother sent him a parcel from Poland he invited us to share his rowanberry vodka and smoked ham. In the summer of 1939 he went back to Poland to fight the Nazis and was killed. Now I met young artists and writers and hundreds of people in different walks of life. A year later I was in Poland again for the Wrocław Congress, and in the following years often went to Warsaw; although these visits were invariably in connection with congresses, conferences, commissions and resolutions I always found time for old and new friends. My affection for the Polish character grew, and what I have to say here will probably sound more like a declaration of love than a description of the country and its people.

For a long time there was a deep rift between the Russians and the Poles: the memory of invasions, partitions and the blood of rebels dies hard. Our history teacher used to tell us that all Poles had the conceit of petty aristocrats, that Poland was ruined because every noble in the Sejm could shout: 'I forbid it!' and thus veto any law. Dostoyevsky, one of my early guides, caricatured the Poles in his novels. I did not know Poland and somewhere buried within me was a latent prejudice against it. I remember how deeply affected I had been by the fervour with which, at our very first meeting, Tuwim had spoken about the Polish character. Later Babel said: 'It's a poetic nation'. And he had known the Poles when they were fighting Soviet Russia. This had made me think, but it was only in 1928, after I had spent some time in Poland, that I began to understand the Poles a little.

Human values – love, art, the joy of work and struggle – do not become realities by being either taught at school or read about in books, but only out of experience. There are also other values of which you become aware only when you are deprived of them. In Paris I understood what bread meant when I had had nothing to eat for several

days and a divine aroma was wafted from the bakeries. In the mountains of Aragon, during the fighting, I discovered what a mouthful of water meant. And as I have already said, you realize fully what your country means to you only when you are away from it. The heightened patriotism of the Poles derives from their history, from the long tale of national dignity trampled underfoot, of which they know from their own sufferings or from their parents.

As I have described, Tuwim, wandering with me among the ruins of Warsaw, kept saying: 'Look how beautiful it is'. Not all Poles said this perhaps, but they all thought it. The old part of Warsaw has been rebuilt with such love for every detail that you forget it is a restoration. This is not a matter of taste alone; you need passion as well.

It is this passion in the national character of the Poles that is so attractive; you feel it in the old sculptures of Stwosz and in their poetry, from Mickiewicz and Slowacki to Tuwim and Galczynski; there is passion in the folksongs and in the long history of unsuccessful rebellions; it was in Dombrowski, about whom an old Communist once talked to me, and in Janek whom I had met near Huesca. You have only to look into the eyes of some moustachioed old pensioner strolling about the streets of staid but wonderful Krakow, to hear the shrill voice of a little girl with a flaxen plait in some remote hamlet burst into a laugh that is like a reminder of tears, and you are made aware over and over again of the extraordinary superabundance of emotion, the astoundingly tangled fortunes of this people.

I have read many stern criticisms of baroque; its exaggeration, capricious juxtapositions and occasional obscurity of intention have been seen as pretentious and formalist, as a negation of sincerity and a repudiation of simplicity. And yet baroque, which came into being when the eclipse of the aristocracy had set in, suited the taste of the common people. There is a certain kinship between the poetry of Góngora, Marino and Gryphius and those clay Christs fashioned by the Polish potters who forget about the size of the heads and hands but are aware of the intensity of human suffering. 'The heart of Chopin lies buried here' may strike the foreigner as odd, but it is consistent with the Polish character.

In 1947 each of us four Soviet writers was given a present of some piece of folk art by the Polish government. The one that fell to my lot was an appliqué rug made by the Galkowskis in Krakow. This rug has cheered me in times of stress for fifteen years. Looking at the legendary

beasts, of species that have never existed, but which live, frisk about, growl and doze in my room, at the stylized maidens and curious knights, what I see is something beyond the wonderful harmony of tones and half-tones; it is a genuine work of art.

Indeed, I find Poland inseparable from art, from the truth that lies in exaggeration, from the vigour of imagination which is capable of transforming a homely little house into a cosmos. The year 1948 was a difficult one for poets and painters. However, even at that time I saw many pictures which proved that art was alive. There is no need to speak of the decade that followed. Many Polish films have been seen all over the world. Polish writers began to be translated. In Kazimierz Brandys's travel notes I found a description of what he felt while eating in a clean, hospitable little West German inn which gave artistic expression to what I myself had dimly perceived.

In Poland imaginative expression is not confined to an élite, it is to be found everywhere amongst the people. Their grey-black jugs, which embody all the hues and dignity of sorrow, are a fine example. A peasant woman, who has never set foot in a town, makes paper cut-outs of tropical forests. If you walk into any shop that sells crockery you are struck both by the good taste and the imagination shown in the wares. Perhaps it is this all-pervading art that draws me to Poland, because it is an integral part of the character of the people, and I am not forgetting here either the Dombrowski Battalion in Spain or the woman lugging stones on a building site in Warsaw.

I have written about Tuwim in an earlier book, but now I should like to say something of his friends in the Skamander group whom I often met in Warsaw. To some people Slonimski seems almost English in the sharpness, even corrosiveness of his irony; but underlying this there is the kindness and the devil-may-care recklessness of Polish poetry and Polish character. Each country has its own brand of irony: the shafts of Cervantes are quite unlike those of Swift or Molière. Slonimski's irony is of the pure essence: unless diluted with water, if not with tears, it would prove too strong for any other country or any other epoch. Iwaszkiewicz strikes one at first as one of fortune's favourites; he is mild, positively placid, with the look of an aristocratic dreamer, but his books express much of the disquiet of our times. There is one particular novel of his which comes to my mind at this moment. It is about a Polish writer who goes to Florence to attend some congress (there seem always to have been writers and congresses, as

inevitable as rain). The plot is reminiscent of Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring* but the atmosphere is that of our age: the love is of a different order and so is the despair.

In 1947 I was still influenced by the impression Poland had made on me twenty years before, when the Russians and the Poles were living in different worlds, so I was particularly careful and anxious to avoid painful subjects; in short I tried to behave like a diplomat. There is rather an amusing story which illustrates how little at the time I realized the changes that had taken place.

I have said that the Poles offered us exceptionally warm hospitality. We were then asked to take a delegation of Polish writers back with us to Moscow for the November celebrations. I was glad that we should be able to entertain them in return. The delegation consisted of the novelist Zofia Nalkowska, a lady of over sixty, the playwright Leon Kruckowski, who was then Deputy Minister of Culture and Art, and the young poet Dobrowolski. We travelled as far as Brest in a special coach, with full honours, but when we arrived there was no one to meet us. (I later learnt that our telegram had been delayed.) The whole thing smelt of disaster: Intourist refused to let our guests have tickets on credit, and we, of course, had not enough roubles. Seeing the Soviet train draw in at the platform, Nalkowska said she was tired and would like to lie down. I told her that the passengers were not yet able to take their seats. (As bad luck would have it, at that very moment a general got into the train with his ADC carrying his suitcases.) I rang up the secretary of the Regional Committee. It was after office hours but I tracked him down at his home. He heard me out and sympathized but explained that there was no one at headquarters so where was he to get the money? I did my best to persuade him, both with entreaties and by throwing out dark hints of 'diplomatic complications'. 'I'll try,' he said at last, 'but I can't guarantee anything.' An hour passed, two hours. Nalkowska asked whether passengers could now board the train. Kruckowski remained courteously silent. Dobrowolski talked a bit about Galczinski and Pasternak but my mind was not on poetry, and from time to time I rushed away to ring up the Regional Secretary and to see whether perhaps a car had been sent. At long last the secretary turned up: 'I've got enough for three places in a sleeper'. I told him to make a little speech of welcome to our guests. Nalkowska was able to lie down at last. We Russians got into a huddle in a compartment and counted our remaining roubles. Dinner tonight,

breakfast, lunch and dinner tomorrow – we should be arriving in Moscow at 11 a.m. the day after tomorrow, so that meant another breakfast. But we found we had only enough for today's dinner. Brovka said he would be leaving the train at Minsk, it was a pity the station was so far from the centre of the town.

I tried to get our meals on tick in the dining-car, saying that we should be able to pay as soon as we reached Moscow, but I was told this was out of the question as an inspector might board the train at any point. We went in to dinner and ordered half a litre of vodka. Nalkowska asked for a small glass of red wine and was brought a whole bottle. Dobrowolski began talking about poetry again but suddenly remarked: 'I'd like to see the poet who could turn an empty bottle into a full one'. I hurried away, counted our capital once again and ordered another bottle. In the morning we said we never took breakfast, only tea. In Minsk Brovka took his leave of us, but a little later he came rushing back: 'It's too far to the Central Committee, so I ran home but my wife was out, and this is all I could find lying about', and he pushed some notes into my hand. It was enough for lunch. We had decided to say that we did not want dinner, but that evening a miracle awaited us at Smolensk: the writer Simonov walked into our carriage. I took him aside at once and suggested he should tell our guests that he had been sent from Moscow to greet the delegation, and I asked him how much money he had on him. 'Not a bean,' he replied. 'I was so glad when I saw you, I thought we'd be able to dine together and split a bottle of wine.' And then in another compartment he saw someone he knew. We were saved.

Two years later, when Dobrowolski and I had become friends, I told him about my emotions when he had talked about turning an empty bottle into a full one. He could not stop laughing: 'Well, that's a positively Polish story'. Kruczkowski also had his laugh later.

When I say that today nothing comes between us and the Poles, I am naturally thinking of things other than Intourist. In 1928 we and the Poles had been living in different worlds. Even Tuwim, even Broniewski were far from understanding everything, and I myself was prone to make hasty judgments. Certain traditional prejudices died hard, and it was only when I revisited Warsaw in 1958 that I felt there was nothing separating us any longer. Slonimski and Iwaszkiewicz had become old friends, but on that occasion I also met younger writers

and, as I talked to them, there seemed to be no frontiers of country or barriers of age.

Neither in the autumn of 1947, in which this chapter begins, nor later have I ever felt isolated in Poland: this is a dry fact but it says a lot.

15

THE MONTHS of which I am about to write are probably amongst the most painful in my whole life; I interrupted my work on the book for a long time trying to summon up the courage to embark on this chapter. I should have been glad enough to omit it altogether. But life is not like a set of galley-proofs; what you live through cannot be deleted on second thoughts. Fifteen years have passed since then. I do not want to reopen old wounds that are healing and I shall leave out certain names as I find the role of prosecutor distasteful. In any case, there is much that I myself do not know, so I shall confine myself to a brief and unadorned account of my own experience.

I realize now that the start of the events which I intend to recount is bound up with the tragic death of Solomon Mikhoëls and, before going further, I shall speak of him. I had met him a long time ago, in the twenties, but did not get to know him well at that time; it was only during the war years that I really began to understand him and grew very attached to him. There was a period when he often came to see us at the Moskva Hotel; on some days he would lustily complain about things or play the fool, on others he would sit in silence, his arms and legs hunched up. He was a great artist and art was his natural element. I shall always remember his *King Lear*. He was unrecognizable; in real life he was short and his face was by no means kingly, it was rather that of a slightly puckish intellectual with a prominent forehead and pouting lower lip. But on the stage his tall, tragic *Lear* was superb in its grief and wrath. Mikhoëls' talent was recognized by actors of different schools of thought. I remember with what admiration Kachalov, Meyerhold and Pitoëff spoke of him. He had never been a nationalist; his feeling for the Russian language made his friend Alexey Tolstoy often remark: 'I can't understand why Solomon won't play in the Russian theatre'. But Mikhoëls' special love was the Jewish theatre. People who did not even understand Yiddish were amongst its regular audiences, for Mikhoëls and Zuskin acted so expressively that everyone was entranced by the adventures of some small-town Jewish *Don Quixote* or the misfortunes of *Tevye-the-Milkman*.

During the war Mikhoëls was the animating spirit of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. No one at the time could spare a thought for art. In the little towns of the Ukraine and Byelorussia the Nazis were murdering Sholem Aleichem's classical characters – and girl-guides. Mikhoëls and the poet Feffer were asked to go to America. In 1946 several Americans told me that in one town where they spoke the platform gave way under the weight of the people who rushed it in order to get closer to the Soviet emissaries. Those two raised millions of dollars for Soviet field-hospitals and children's homes.

After the victory thousands of people went to Mikhoëls for help, because they saw him as the wise rabbi, the defender of the oppressed.

And then Mikhoëls was killed.

At the time we were told that he had gone to Minsk with Golubov-Potapov on some assignment for the committee which awarded the Stalin Prizes: he was supposed to be judging a production nominated for the award. One evening he was invited to some people and, accompanied by Golubov-Potapov, was walking along a street in the suburbs when they were either set upon and killed by bandits or, according to another account, run over by a lorry. In the spring of 1948 either version was credible, but six months later both began to be doubted. When Zuskin was arrested everybody asked themselves how did Mikhoëls really meet his death? Not long ago a Soviet paper published in Lithuania reported that he had been killed by Beria's agents. It is not for me to hazard a guess why Beria, who could quite easily have arrested Mikhoëls, should have had recourse to such a criminal ruse; certainly it could not have been out of respect for public opinion; it can only have been that it was his idea of fun.

I went to the funeral service at Mikhoëls' theatre. His mutilated features had been made up with grease-paint. There were speeches. I remember Fadeyev's in particular. A crowd stood outside in the street and many people wept.

On the evening of 24th May a commemorative meeting was held. I made a speech but cannot remember what I said. I felt very bitter.

Still I did not foresee what was to come.

In September 1948, at the editor's request, I wrote an article for *Pravda* on the 'Jewish Question', Palestine and anti-Semitism. Here are a few extracts:

'Obscurantists have for ages past invented lies representing the Jews as a special kind of creature, unlike other human beings. They

said that the Jews led a life apart, isolated from the rest of the community, not participating in the joys and sorrows of the people amongst whom they lived. The obscurantists claimed that the Jews felt no attachment to any country, that they were eternally rootless. The obscurantists stated that the Jews in every country were bound together by mysterious ties.

'... Yes, the Jews did lead a life apart, isolated from the community – when they were forced to do so. The ghetto was not an invention of Jewish mystics but of Catholic religious fanatics. In the days when a religious fog obscured men's sight, there were fanatics among the Jews just as there were fanatics among Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox and Muslim believers. But as soon as the gates of the ghetto were thrown open, and the fog of the medieval night lifted, the Jews of every country were absorbed into the common life of the peoples.

'Yes, many Jews left their native land and emigrated to America. But this was not because they had no love for their homeland; they emigrated because oppression and insults made them strangers in that land. Was it only the Jews who, at various times, sought refuge in other countries? Did not the Italians, the Irish, the Slavs in countries under the yoke of Turks and Germans, the Armenians and the Russian dissenters also do so?

'... There is little in common between a Tunisian Jew and a Jew living in Chicago who speaks and thinks as an American. If there is a tie between them it is far from a mystical one: it is the tie forged by anti-Semitism. The unspeakable atrocities committed by the German fascists, the mass murder of the Jewish population which they proclaimed and carried out in country after country, the racial propaganda, beginning with humiliation and ending with the crematoria of Maidanek, yes, all this did create the feeling of a strong common bond between the Jews of different countries: the solidarity of the oppressed and the outraged.

'... There are, of course, both nationalists and mystics among the Jews. It is they who drew up the Zionist programme, but it is not they who drove the Jewish population to Palestine. This was done by the ideologists of race-hatred, those adepts of inhumanity, those anti-Semites who uprooted the Jews from their long-established homes and forced them to seek in distant parts not so much happiness as the right to human dignity ...'

In my article I quoted what Gorky and Lenin had said about anti-Semitism, and I also quoted Stalin: 'Anti-Semitism, as the extreme form of racial chauvinism, is the most dangerous survival of cannibalism'.

A newspaper article is not a testament, there is much one cannot say in it. Now, as I near the end of my memoirs, I should like to state my beliefs on what is often called the 'Jewish Question'.

As a child I heard talk of the Dreyfus affair and Jewish pogroms. I knew that Leo Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky were repelled by the way the Russians were set against the Jews. Some years later I read in the illegal newspaper an article about this by Lenin. My father said that anti-Semitism was a survival of fanaticism and ignorance, and I shared that view.

As the reader knows, I was born in Kiev, my mother-tongue is Russian. I know neither Yiddish nor Hebrew. I have never prayed in a Synagogue, nor yet in an Orthodox or Catholic Church. I have admired and still admire certain works of art which, for the believer, have a religious connotation but for me connote human thoughts and feelings: the Book of Job, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, the Gospels, including the Apocrypha, the Apocalypse, Chartres Cathedral, the Acropolis, Andrey Rublev's icons, Fra Angelico's paintings, the Hindu goddesses at Ellora and the frescoes in the ancient Buddhist monastery of Ajanta. These things mean to me not dead religious canons but living art. I spent my childhood and early youth in Moscow and my comrades were Russians. When I worked in the illegal organization we called each other by aliases, and I was not interested to know whether any of my comrades were Jews. Then I found myself in Paris. I met two wonderful people: one of them, Apollinaire, was of Polish origin, the other, Max Jacob, was a Jew, but for me, they were both Frenchmen. I was very devoted to the Italian Modigliani; he once told me that he was a Jew, but for me he was forever associated with the anxiety of the pre-war years and with the art of the Italian Renaissance; certainly not with Yahveh.

I love Spain, Italy and France, but all my years are inseparable from Russian life. I have never concealed my origin. There were times when I did not give it a thought, and others when I said wherever I could: 'I am a Jew', for to my mind solidarity with the persecuted is the first principle of humanitarianism.

I saw Chaplin's films and it never entered my head to ask if he was a Jew; it was the Nazis who said he was. They drew up black lists: the

composer Milhaud, the philosopher Bergson were said to be Jews, and so were people whom I had met without ever thinking about their origin, like Julien Benda, Anna Seghers and authors whom I had read, such as Kafka.

Is there a special innate Jewish national character? Anti-Semites and Jewish nationalists say there is. It is possible that centuries of persecution and humiliation sharpened their irony and fostered in them romantic hopes of a better future. National character manifests itself most vividly in artistic creation. Heine's poetry is full of romantic irony, but is it to be explained by the poet's origins or by his epoch? When I consider the works of my contemporaries – Modigliani, Kafka, Soutine – what I see first and foremost is the spirit of tragedy reflecting reality and mingling memories with foreboding or foresight. Mathematics is one of the manifestations of human intelligence least affected by climate, language or traditions. Yet in the early thirties there were scholars in Germany who dismissed Einstein's Theory of Relativity as 'Jewish spoof'.

In the old days anti-Semitism was bound up with religion, with the idea of redemption: 'the Jews crucified Christ'. Then the power of the priests gradually waned. Many people began to realize that Christ was only one of those Jewish rebels who opposed the orthodox priests for their collaboration with the Roman occupation. The French Revolution declared equal rights for the Jews. Various States, one after the other, abrogated the proscriptions that had been in force for centuries. The Jews began to live the life of the peoples to whose land their ancestors had come.

At the end of the last century the Dreyfus affair demonstrated that anti-Semitism, though it had lain dormant, was still alive. For several years the eyes of millions of people were focussed on Dreyfus, who was no more than an insignificant, conscientious French officer, trained to discipline. When Zola took up the defence of the wrongly condemned man he was supported by Tolstoy, Verhaeren, Mark Twain, Jaurès, Anatole France, Maeterlinck, R. C. K. Ensor, Monet, Jules Renard, Signac, Péguy, Octave Mirbeau, Mallarmé and Charles-Louis Philippe. And who were those who sided with the accusers? The nationalist writers Barrès, Maurras and Déroulède. The anti-Dreyfusards were not only anti-Semites but enemies of progress and chauvinists to a man; in their newspapers and pamphlets they called Zola 'a dirty little Italian'.



Above: Vladimir Clementis (left) with Caça, the puppy.
Below: Ilya Ehrenburg and Frederic Joliot-Curie





London 1950: Ilya Ehrenburg at a peace meeting in Trafalgar Square

Before the Revolution Russian Jews were allowed to live only within the pale of settlement. In Ukrainian and Byelorussian towns, large and small, they lived cut off from the rest of the population and their language was Yiddish. The Revolution changed all that; young Jews poured into Russian schools and universities. Jewish girls married Russians, Jews married Russian girls. The isolation of the Jews was fast disappearing, not only in Russia but also in France and even in Germany. Then to give new life to anti-Semitism came Hitler's 'racial theory'.

Talk about 'inferior races' was by no means new. When I described my trip to the Southern States of America I was at pains to show how strong and deep-seated racism was in a civilized country; nevertheless, in the twenties we had regarded the Alabama and Mississippi slave-owners as exceptions. When Hitler appeared on the scene he and his followers set out to prove the existence of superior races – headed by the 'Aryan' or 'Nordic' race – and inferior ones, of which the lowest was the Jews.

During the Civil War I had witnessed a Jewish pogrom organized by the Whites. Several months later a drunken Wrangel officer, shouting 'Death to the Yids, save Russia!' tried to push me overboard into the water. I thought this quite natural: these were survivals from the past fighting to uphold the power of darkness.

In Montparnasse during the late twenties I met a Jewish writer from Poland, Warszawski, and some of his friends. They told me many amusing stories about the superstitions and the cunning of the old type small-town Jew. I read a collection of Hasidic legends which I found pleasingly poetic. It gave me the idea of writing a satirical novel. Its hero is a Gomel tailor, Lazik Roitshvantz, a poor fellow whom fate tosses from one country to another. I described our NEPmen¹ and provincial dogmatists, Polish cavalry captains, German petty bourgeois, French aesthetes and English hypocrites. Finally, in despair Lazik decides to go to Palestine but the so-called Promised Land turns out to be like any other: the rich have a good life, the poor a wretched one. Lazik tries to organize a 'Return-to-the-Homeland Association', on the grounds that he was not born under a palm-tree but in his beloved Gomel. He is killed by Jewish fanatics. Western critics called my hero 'the Jewish Schweik'. (This book is not included in my

¹ Profiteers in the period of the New Economic Policy.

collected works, not because I think badly of it or repudiate it, but because, since the Nazi atrocities, I think it premature to republish some of its comical passages.)

Hitler's coming to power stunned me: a civilized country was thrown back into the black night of obscurantism. The *Kristallnacht* (as the Nazis called the night of the 1938 mass pogroms) was for me one of the hateful manifestations of fascism. The Nazis burnt books by Jewish authors and also the works of Engels, Lenin, Gorky, Romain Rolland, Zola, Barbusse and Heinrich Mann. They killed German Communists of 'Aryan' descent. In Spain I came face to face with the savage reality of fascism.

During the Nazi invasion of our country I witnessed many atrocities. The Nazis killed Russian children, they burnt down villages in the Ukraine and in Byelorussia. I was writing about this daily in the newspapers. Others also wrote about it. The Nazi leaflets claimed that they were wiping out only the Jews and it was imperative to nail this lie.

At the end of the war, Vassily Grossman and I began to collect material relating to the mass extermination of Jews in those parts of the country overrun by the Nazis: letters written on the eve of death, diaries kept by a painter in Riga, a girl student in Kharkov, by old men and by children. This compilation of human documents was to be called *The Black Book*. While it showed up the hideous deeds of the Nazis it also brought out the bright virtues of courage, solidarity and love. The type was set up, the book reached proof stage, and we were told that it would be published in 1948.

The Zionist theories based on ancient history have never had any appeal for me. The State of Israel, however, exists. In the days when Arab culture flourished the Jews did not know persecutions like those of the Inquisition, and in the various Muslim kingdoms of Andalusia such men lived and worked as the philosopher Maimonides and the poet Judah ha-Levi. I like to believe that the Jews of Israel, who know from personal experiences the meaning of injustice, will find a way of making peace with the Arabs. It is clear to everyone that the millions of Jews living in the various countries of Europe and America cannot find room in Israel and, besides, they are too closely associated with the peoples among whom they live to want to emigrate. The Negroes of Alabama and Mississippi do not dream of migrating to one of the sovereign States of Black Africa, they only demand equal rights and fight racial prejudice.

What makes me one with all Jews are the pits in which the Nazis buried old women and children, the rivers of blood that have flowed in the past and the cruel weeds that later sprang from racist seeds, the persistence of prejudice and intolerance. In the speech I made on my seventieth birthday I told my listeners that so long as there is a single anti-Semite in the world I shall declare with pride that I am a Jew. It was not nationalism that dictated those words but my respect for human dignity. I still believe that anti-Semitism is an ugly survival from the past and that it will disappear like all other racial intolerance; but what I now know is that to cleanse minds of age-old prejudice is going to take a very long time.

To go back to the days of which I was speaking: at the end of 1948 the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was dissolved, the newspaper *Einigkeit* closed down and the type set up for *The Black Book* was distributed. Not long after, authors who wrote in Yiddish – Peretz Markisch, Kvitko, Bergelson, Feffer and others – were arrested.

In January 1949 the press announced 'the discovery of an anti-patriotic group of drama critics'. No one can say why the campaign was opened with so minor an issue as theatrical criticism. Perhaps some disgruntled playwright had complained to Stalin at a propitious moment, or it may have been quite by chance: it does not matter into what part of a pool you throw a stone, the ripples will spread.

The first article in the campaign posed the question: 'How can A. Gurvich form an idea of the national character of Russian Soviet man?' Two days later I came across another article in which 'gurviches and yuzovskys' were referred to, without capitals. The circle of 'cosmopolitans' was widened to include certain poets and film directors who were thus brought in to join the critics. A fortnight later 'rootless cosmopolitans' hiding their identity under pen-names were unmasked.

Many of my friends were appalled by what was going on. I remember conversations with Obraztsov, Konchalovsky, the architect Rudnev, with Fadeyev, Vsevolod Ivanov and the sculptress Lebedeva. There should be no need to remind readers that all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, were absolutely contrary to the traditions of the Russian intelligentsia and to those high ideals of internationalism which were Lenin's legacy and on which the Soviet people was reared.

The persecution of 'cosmopolitans' was not an isolated phenomenon. Large numbers of people were arrested who, through no fault of their own, had been taken prisoner by the fascists, or had not had time to be

evacuated from overrun territory, or had voluntarily returned from exile abroad, or had been 'repressed' in the thirties, or had relatives in foreign countries. Beria's arbitrary operations were truly comprehensive.

As for myself, from the beginning of February 1949 I was not allowed to publish anything. My name was deleted from the critics' reviews. These symptoms were quite familiar, and every night I expected the front-door bell to ring. The telephone was silent; only close friends rang up to inquire how I was. There were also those who 'checked': the more cautious of our acquaintances would ring up from a call-box to find out whether I had been arrested and on hearing my voice would put down the receiver.

In March 1938 I used to listen anxiously to the lift: in those days I had wanted passionately to live; like many others I had kept a suitcase ready packed with two changes of underwear. In March 1949 I gave no thought to underwear and awaited the outcome almost with indifference. Perhaps it was because I was now fifty-eight and not forty-seven; I was tired and beginning to feel old. Or perhaps because it was a repeat performance, which, coming after the war and the victory over fascism, seemed utterly intolerable. We went to bed late, in the small hours: the idea that they might come and wake me up was too horrible. Once the bell rang at two o'clock in the morning. Lyuba went to open the door. Simonov's wife had sent their driver to find out if her husband was with me.

At the end of March a friend of ours dropped in and shouted with pleasure: 'So it isn't true!' He told us that the day before, at a lecture on literature, a speaker who at the time held a rather responsible position had announced in the presence of over a thousand people: 'I can give you some good news: *Cosmopolitan* Number One and enemy of the people Ilya Ehrenburg has been exposed and arrested'.

I wrote a short letter to Stalin saying that for the last two months I had been denied all journalistic work and that the day before So-and-so had announced my arrest; that in fact, however, I had not been arrested and I wished to have my position clarified. All I asked was that an end be put to the uncertainty. I took my letter to the Kremlin sentry-box.

The next day Malenkov rang me up. I remember the conversation clearly. 'You wrote to Stalin. He asked me to ring you up. Tell me, how did all this start?' 'I've no idea. I should like to ask you that.' 'But

why didn't you let us know sooner?' 'I spoke to Comrade Pospelov, that was all I could do.' 'Strange, Comrade Pospelov is a very reliable man but he never said a word to us.' (Some years later Pospelov told me that this was not true; that he had passed on what I had told him but his words had produced no effect.)

Immediately the telephone came to life again: various editorial offices said that there had been a 'misunderstanding', that my articles would be published and would I write some more.

A. M. Efros and L. N. Chernyavsky were with me at the time. G. M. Kozintsev, who had 'flu, lay on the sofa. He jumped up wrapped in a blanket. Everyone started talking excitedly.

It is easy to be wise after the event. In the spring of 1949 I did not understand anything at all. Now that we know a little I believe that Stalin used a technique of heavy camouflage. Fadeyev told me that the press campaign against the 'unpatriotic critics' had been launched on Stalin's instructions. But a few weeks later he summoned the editors and said: 'Comrades, the divulging of literary pseudonyms is inadmissible, it smells of anti-Semitism'. Rumour attributed the arbitrary measures to those who carried them out while Stalin was thought to have been a restraining influence. By the end of March he apparently decided that the job was done.

The *Schadenfreude* of our country's foreign enemies made me feel the more bitter. Here was the Soviet people that for thirty years had fought for the ideas of October against the Interventionists and the Whites, against fascist invasion, against pogromists and racists: the people had no hand in the writing of the newspaper articles I have described, they worked from morning till night and never turned aside from the path they had chosen.

Several years later, a journalist in Israel came out with some sensational disclosures. He said that while in prison he had met the poet Feffer who, he alleged, had told him that I was responsible for the arrest of the Jewish writers. This calumny was taken up by several Western papers. Their single-minded line of reasoning was: 'He has survived, so he must be a traitor'.

I was in wretched form and could not work. Then I was told that I must go to Paris for the World Peace Congress. The defence of peace seemed to me a splendid thing but I did not feel I had the strength to go. It would have been torture to find myself abroad in the state in which I was. I was asked to write a speech and submit it for approval.

Faced with a blank sheet I began to write about what was stirring me most deeply. This passage occurred in the speech: 'There is nothing more odious than racial and national arrogance. World culture has arteries which cannot be severed with impunity. The peoples have learnt and will continue learning from one another. I believe it is possible to respect distinctive national features while rejecting national exclusiveness'. I was summoned to Grigorian, who held a rather high position, and he pressed my hand and thanked me. My speech, typed out on good paper, was lying on his desk, and against the passage I have quoted were the words 'Well said!' in a handwriting that looked to me painfully familiar.

We flew to Paris in the middle of April. It was cold in Moscow and there were white patches of snow in the little wood near Vnukovo air-field. Lyuba said that in Paris I should be able to rest and relax, to which I replied: 'Yes, of course'.

Elsa Triolet was at the airport. She said she and Aragon would come to pick me up that evening and we would dine together. We were taken to the embassy where the ambassador gave a survey of the political situation. I tried to listen but could not, and I suddenly realized I was ill: I was bathed in sweat and was sure I was running a temperature. Of all idiotic things to happen! Later I was taken to an hotel on the right bank, near the Salle Pleyel where the congress was to be held. I could neither understand nor see anything — my fever must be raging. Suddenly the taxi-driver, an elderly Frenchman, said: 'What frightful heat'. I stared: 'Oh, do you feel hot too?' It was his turn to be surprised: 'Why, it's 86 in the shade, all the papers say there hasn't been such a hot April for a hundred years'. I was overjoyed: this meant that I was not ill after all. Then I saw what I had failed to notice before: on the café terraces men were sitting in their shirt-sleeves drinking beer or lemonade. But my head was still not very clear.

The Aragons took me to the noisy Restaurant Méditerranée; it was crowded; people were telling one another how they had spent their Easter holidays. Acquaintances came up to the Aragons, there were jokes and laughter. Then Louis and Elsa asked me in Russian: 'What is meant by "cosmopolitans"? Why are pen-names violated?' They were my own people, I had known them for a quarter of a century, but I could not answer their questions. When Cocteau came up and started some urbane social chatter I forced myself to smile. Huge *langoustes*

slowly waved their great antennae. People at neighbouring tables were laughing. It was insufferably hot.

Back at the hotel I quickly undressed and put out the light hoping to sleep but soon realized that it was no use. I tossed and turned, switched on the light, and then for no particular reason put on my clothes again, sat down in an armchair and gave rein to my imagination: what could I think up to make them send me home tomorrow? I reviewed all the possible variants: fall ill, say that I shan't be able to speak, or simply that I want to go home. I sat up till the morning. The image of Peretz Markisch as I had seen him for the last time rose before me. I recalled phrases from newspaper articles and kept on saying to myself stupidly: 'I must go home'.

I have said that in this chapter I wanted to recount the most difficult time I ever had to live through. I hardly think I have succeeded, for how can one really convey such things? Let me add only this: the most terrible experience of all was that first night in Paris when, in the long narrow hotel room, I realized the price a man has to pay for being 'true to men, to the century, to fate'.

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IN THE morning Fotinsky hurried in while I was shaving: 'I read in the paper that you'd arrived and they told me at the embassy where to find you'. Fotinsky did not put any awkward questions but began telling me about the strikes, said that he thought everybody was against the government, and gossiped about Montparnasse, Dusya and painters. 'There are a lot of interesting shows on just now. Are you free to come along?' We walked about till lunchtime. I looked in turn at the Seine, at the grey houses with their greenish shutters, at Cézanne's apples. Everything seemed to me beautiful but dreadfully alien. 'Are you all right?' Fotinsky asked anxiously. I said I was quite well but had not had enough sleep. I was not thinking about anything, but could forget nothing. I found it difficult to make more than desultory conversation.

Before lunch we went to a café. Someone had left a paper on one of the tables. I opened it automatically and my eye caught the words: 'Criminal laxity of the Government. Yesterday a group arrived from Moscow with the task of organizing disturbances in Paris under the trade sign "World Peace Congress". The Government has even granted a visa to Ilya Ehrenburg, author of the libellous novel *The Fall of Paris* and whose title to fame is that Stalin has presented him with a Grand Duke's palace in the Crimea as a reward for organizing a terrorist network in the countries free of Communist tyranny. Defending peace with Ehrenburg will be Thorez's representative, the enterprising Aragon, the English "scientist" Bernal, unknown in scientific circles but well known to the police, an individual named Zweig who claims to be a writer, Joliot-Curie, of course, who has finally decided to exchange his profession of physicist for that of chief Kremlin agitator, and the old clown Picasso who has produced the Marxist dove which befouls all the walls of our beautiful but, alas, defenceless Paris'. I shoved the newspaper into my pocket and said to Fotinsky: 'Let's drink to our enemies'. He did not know what I was talking about but I did not try to explain.

While working on these memoirs and recalling the troubled years I

often think with gratitude of those enemies. Of course, scurrilous language such as that of the passage I have just quoted was to be found only in the yellow press of the future 'Ultras'. *Le Figaro* and even *L'Aurore* went in for a more restrained style but they, too, resorted to calumny and threats. The enemies helped me in my own struggles, acting as a constant reminder that, however bitter the events of those months and years had been, they must not be allowed to come between me and the things that really mattered most. And it worked in this way on that particular occasion: it brought me to my senses and I even brightened up.

On the next day the Peace Congress opened. It was held in the large Salle Pleyel in a prosperous quarter of the city, but among the crowd that had gathered at the entrance since early morning there were students, shop-assistants, workers and ordinary inquisitive bystanders. Joliot-Curie, Picasso, Yves Farge and Aragon were recognized and cheered. The bright national costumes of some Polish and Slovak women and the kilts of some Highlanders excited a great deal of interest. There were speculations about where the bearded ecclesiastic in a snow-white chimney-pot hat had come from – was it Greece or Bulgaria? This was Nikolay, Metropolitan of Krutitsy and Kolomna. (I travelled several times by air with him to congresses or meetings of the World Council of Peace and always he was accompanied by the bandbox in which he carried his hat.) Abbé Boulrier in his soutane and Indian women delegates in colourful saris passed into the hall.

The delegates, some two thousand of them, and the visitors filled the hall to overflowing. Exclamations in every language – familiar and unfamiliar – could be heard. There was a noisy, southern atmosphere about the whole thing, the largest delegations being French and Italian. This was, to the best of my belief, the first international congress held since the war, and it was something quite new for the younger people present. Speeches were frequently interrupted by shouts, laughter and applause.

By 1949 the cold war had spread from newspaper articles to State Treaties and, indeed, to everyday life. It was in that year that the North Atlantic Pact was concluded. The division of Germany had taken on statehood: the West German Federal Republic was proclaimed, and six months later the German Democratic Republic. At one of the congress sessions it was announced that the People's Army had liberated Nanking; the Chinese People's Republic also came into being

in 1949, while it was then, too, that Holland was forced to recognize the independence of Indonesia. Fighting continued in Vietnam. There was also fighting in Greece, though the outcome of the civil war was predetermined by the 'Truman Doctrine'. In Italy strikes flared up now and again; there were violent demonstrations and no one knew what turn things would take. I felt that in France itself the struggle was growing in violence; not until a year later did I realize that the great strikes of 1947-48 had been the last receding waves of the post-war storm. The Americans were handing out money (under the 'Marshall Plan'). The factories began to replace their worn-out equipment. More goods appeared in the shops. It is true that prices rose and many of the French still had a thin time, but everybody realized that economically the country was finding its feet.

However, readers of both *Le Figaro* and *L'Humanité* did not dare to think of the future. In a moderately priced restaurant I overheard a conversation that reminded me of the spring of 1939: 'We've decided to spend the holidays near Brive where my wife has an aunt. That is, of course, if there's no war . . .' Englishmen, Italians and Belgians told me there was a similar mood in their countries too. The Congress was a response to the anxiety of hundreds of millions of people because the memory of the war was still too fresh and the information in the press too disquieting. Some feared that the Americans would launch a preventive war, while others believed that any day now Russian tanks would start rolling towards the Atlantic coast.

The papers that supported Truman's policy had intended to pass the congress over in silence but could not maintain it. I still have a cutting from *Paris-Presse*: 'On being asked at a press conference whether he thought America really wanted peace the well-known Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg said: "One cannot do both things at once - talk peace and at the same time bring an atom bomb out of one's pocket". American reactions followed swiftly. Last night the State Department Press Officer MacDermott stated that the delegates to the Paris World Peace Congress were trying to prove, in accordance with their instructions, that the Soviet Union alone wanted peace. This was merely clever Moscow propaganda'. *Le Monde* said that the Communists had 'hit upon a slogan that appeals to everyone'.

The allegation that this was a Communist congress was not true. One need only go through the list of people on the Organizing Committee, of those who sent messages and greetings, of those who

took part, to find politicians, writers and artists who were very far from accepting Communist ideology. Here are some of those names, and they can also be found in the *Petit Larousse Illustré* and are therefore known even to French schoolchildren: the ex-President of Mexico, General Cárdenas, Elisabeth the Queen Dowager of the Belgians, Heinrich Mann, Matisse, Chagall, Charlie Chaplin and the French playwright Salacrou. Among the various organizations which had sponsored the convening of the congress I find: the Geneva Watchmakers' Union, the University of Panama, the Union of Argentine Artists, the Association of Tunisian Small Traders, the Norwegian Housewives' Association, the Syrian League for the Care and Protection of Children, and others that bear no resemblance to Communist Parties.

At the congress I heard several speeches by people whom it would be difficult to associate with Socialism, let alone Communism. I had met the American John Rogge for the first time at the Wroclaw Congress. He seemed to me a good speaker, rather muddleheaded in some respects, but businesslike even if slightly naive, like many other Americans I had met in the USA. In a conversation with me he said that mankind's salvation lay in psychoanalysis. The audience applauded when he condemned the North Atlantic Treaty. He said it was wrong for the Americans to fear the Russians and for the Russians to fear the Americans; the world was drifting towards war, goaded by universal fear. He also said that both Capitalism and Socialism had their weaknesses and their virtues: this provoked disapproving noises from the young Italians and Frenchmen. However, there was applause for Rogge when he finished speaking, and he was elected to the permanent committee of the congress. (At the Second congress, held in Warsaw, he protested against the Soviet attitude to Yugoslavia and accused both camps of being responsible for the Korean War. His speech was interrupted by whistling from the more excitable delegates. He has since dropped out of the movement. I have been told that in America not only Rogge's political attitude but his standards later suffered a sharp change. He played a part in the conviction of the Rosenbergs.)

The English lawyer Harvey Moore criticized certain of the delegates' speeches with Pickwickian humour for being too bellicose and advised greater caution in the choice of expressions; he said that what was needed was an agreement acceptable to all rather than one-sided

condemnations. The cold war had accustomed everybody to very different language, and Moore's speech aroused some resentment, though he was allowed to finish what he had to say and was even mildly applauded.

Of all the speeches the one that angered the young Communists most was probably that of the Swedish woman pacifist, Elsa Cedergren, the head of a religious organization. Here are two quotations from reports of the congress: "'We are threatened by two giants: American Capitalism and Russian Bolshevism,'" she said [interruptions in the hall]'. And her concluding words were: "'Let us try to become a bridge spanning the gulf that has divided the world. Mankind needs peace and freedom.'" [Noisy applause]'.

Only two well-known professional politicians spoke at the congress: the leading Italian Socialist Nenni and the left-wing British Labour M.P. Zilliacus. The delegates knew that Joliot-Curie, Picasso, Neruda and Amado were Communists but it was as great scientists and artists that they were acclaimed.

(Like every other movement, that of the Partisans of Peace ebbed and flowed; it was fluid – some people left, others joined. Most of the Italian Socialists withdrew in 1956. At various times and for various reasons such writers as Howard Fast, Erik Blomberg, Vercors, Martin-Chauffier, Jean Cassou and Italo Calvino dropped out. Sartre spoke at the 1952 congress. Those who joined were d'Astier de la Vigerie, the Swedish writer Artur Lundqvist, some members of the Indian Congress Party, the Japanese Professor Yasui and many more. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the peace movement has been the part played both by people who are in no sense politicians – scientists like Joliot-Curie and Bernal – and brilliant dilettantes in various fields including politics such as Yves Farge and d'Astier.)

If in 1949 the social struggle in Western Europe had gradually begun to subside, the struggle against war preparations was only just gathering momentum. At the Paris congress there were of course many well-known personalities (amongst writers alone Aragon, Neruda, Eluard, Amado, Zweig, Fadeyev, Anna Seghers, Guillén and Andrić), but it was first and foremost a congress of people whom the newspapers refer to as 'simple', although more often than not they are far more complex than many a celebrity.

In the lobby I met the delegate from Lorient, a town that had been badly damaged during the war; her name was Madame Guéret. She

did not speak at the congress but told me why she had decided to take part in the struggle for peace: 'My son Louis was a sailor, he was killed in 1942. He was engaged and he was such a lively boy. My son Joseph went into the Maquis. He fought with the partisans not far from Lorient. He was sent somewhere on a motor-bike, I don't know what for, and somebody denounced him. They tortured and killed him and burnt his body, one of his comrades told me about it. My son Gilbert was a partisan too, at first in the Corrèze and then later, like Joseph, near Lorient. He was wounded, both his legs were amputated, and he died on the eve of victory, on May the 7th. At the hospital they told me that before he died he called for his mother. My son Albert was married, he has left two little girls. He was shot near our house. I have met a lot of mothers here, I understand why they have come. Our arms are too short to embrace our children as we would like to on the first day of war, and afterwards our arms are useless because there's no one to embrace'. I wrote down her words.

I also met some of my old friends: the Italian writer Bontempelli and Pablo Neruda whom I had not seen since the war; and other people who later became my friends – Joliot-Curie, Yves Farge, Jorge Amado and Ivor Montagu (about all of whom I shall have more to say in later chapters). New impressions crowded in thick and fast.

There were also some Yugoslavs at the congress but, in accordance with Stalin's directives, the Socialist press called them 'traitors'. Ivo Andrić sent me a Havana with a note: 'We cannot meet just now but remember that I remain your friend'.

On the second day of the congress the French arranged a press conference for me in the bar of the Salle Pleyel. Some hundred and fifty journalists of different nationalities and different views were assembled. I had to answer ninety-two questions, many of which were barbed. *Le Monde*, whose attitude towards the congress was in general hostile, wrote: 'M. Ehrenburg may wear his tie inside out but his answers show that appearances can be deceptive'. The *Giornale d'Italia* said: 'Ilya Ehrenburg answered the questions with surprising equanimity and emerged unscathed'. As a matter of fact I was acutely nervous and perhaps that was why I seemed calm.

After the press conference I went with Nicolás Guillén to a small restaurant on the left bank. In February I had translated a dozen of his short poems. He asked me to read the translations to him and nodding his head approvingly repeated the line which goes: 'Oh, Cuba, say

whence came your azure . . .’ We talked about the nature of poetry, about the mysterious attraction and repulsion that words exercise, and I forgot the press conference.

The journalists, however, gave me no peace. The next morning a man barged into my room without knocking and said rather disgustingly: ‘What, not dressed yet? Then I suppose there’s nothing doing’. That night I dined with some Italian journalists. The publisher Einaudi had asked me out and, at his request, I had chosen my own restaurant, which was Joséphine’s where two years before I had taken Galaktionov and Simonov. We were engaged in lively conversation when Joséphine’s husband, an extremely large man, said to me: ‘There are two pressmen outside, they want to take photographs of you’. I looked through the crack of the door and recognized the fellow who had come into my room that morning without knocking. ‘I’m not having it,’ I said. There was some noise: the host was getting rid of the tenacious journalists. I got back to my hotel late at night. The lift was the sort that shuts with a grille. Suddenly a flash-bulb exploded and I saw a familiar face and a camera. *Samedi-Soir* published a picture with the caption: ‘Ilya Ehrenburg in Paris hides behind an iron curtain’. I looked like a bad-tempered old convict: the press-photographer knew his job.

Anyone going through the records of the congress and evoking the climate of those years would call my speech most peaceable. I have said that when I wrote it in Moscow I was rather hoping that it would not be approved and that I should not have to go to the congress at all. I made it clear in this speech that I not only dissociated myself from the current trend of claiming for Russia priority for almost every invention, but I also recalled Herzen’s words about the ‘sacred stones’ of Europe. I ended by saying: ‘Let us preserve our common home, let us preserve our ancient culture. We address this appeal not only to people of like mind but to all men of goodwill, whether they are Marxists or followers of Kant, freethinkers or Catholics. We came here not to prove the rightness of our ideas or the superiority of our social system. We prefer to prove this by work, creative effort, the progress of the Soviet State. We came here to extend our hand to all people who really loathe war’. This went down quite well with the audience, perhaps because I was speaking with the utmost sincerity: I thought then and I think now that only by such unity can peace be preserved.

On the next day, a Sunday, a gigantic meeting was held in the

Buffalo stadium, in a southern suburb of Paris. Peace 'caravans' arrived from the provinces by train and coach; they also came from Italy and included the mayors of twenty towns; they came from Belgium and from Holland. The delegations paraded past the platform. The stadium holds eighty thousand people, but the number of demonstrators, according to the press, was between four and five hundred thousand. I was particularly moved by the contingent of former concentration camp inmates who marched past wearing the striped uniforms with numbers on them which they had kept as relics.

Towards the evening, just after the meeting had ended, a thunderstorm broke out and rain came down in torrents. I took shelter under an awning in a small street near by. A woman was standing there too, in the black cloth dress that countrywomen wear when they go into the city; her face was ruddy and wrinkled like a winter pippin. She was glad of the rain for there had been none since February, and the spring had been unusually early and hot: 'Even God has felt it'. Some of the demonstrators were running down the street anxious to get out of the rain, and the woman said, as she watched them pouring past: 'They'll see now that people aren't all fools'.

Picasso invited me to his studio where I found Eluard. We lunched together, celebrating a happy occasion for the previous day a daughter had been born to Picasso. His proud smile was like that of a young father although he was then in his late sixties. (But one never thinks about Picasso's age: in his youth he had looked like a worldly wise old man and today I am struck by his youthful vivacity.) He said he intended to call his daughter Paloma (which is the Spanish for 'dove'). We watched a dozen live pigeons in a huge cage: they were bickering among themselves and making rather ugly noises.

I had taken along a newspaper which had an article called 'Churchill and Picasso'. Picasso asked me to read it aloud. The article described a Royal Academy dinner, attended by Churchill and Field Marshal Lord Montgomery. The President, Sir Alfred Munnings, in his speech inveighed against modern painting in general and the work of Picasso and Matisse in particular. He said they were incapable of drawing a tree that looked like a tree, and added that Mr Winston Churchill shared his views. He then went on to describe how a few days ago, as the two of them were out walking together, Churchill had asked him whether, if they happened to run into Picasso, he would join him, Churchill, in kicking Picasso's backside, to which he had replied:

'Certainly'. Picasso pretended to be very frightened: 'A good thing I'm not in London. After all, there were two of them. And what if the Field Marshal had joined in?'

Eluard was not very talkative. We were wandering about the large studio looking at the paintings, when he remarked quietly: 'It's absolutely necessary. Not only for me and for you, but for everybody. It's like air ...'

Picasso looked at his watch: 'Time to go to the congress'. He always listened attentively to the long speeches, worked in the committee and spoke in its name; in short, he behaved like a model congress member. Only now and then, when some speaker in his efforts to prove the advantages of peace over war started quoting Aristophanes, Victor Hugo, Marx and Stalin, Picasso's eyes would gleam wickedly.

I was taken to a street in the neighbourhood of the Comédie Française. Pablo Neruda, who had just arrived, was staying there in a luxury flat. The sight of him took me aback: I had never imagined that a moustache, even an enormous one, could alter a face to such an extent. Some people say that Neruda looks like a Buddha, others compare him to an anteater; in any case a moustache does not suit him, and he had grown it only to avoid being recognized. He had made his way from Chile to Argentina, and from there had travelled to Paris under an assumed name. He could not show himself in the Salle Pleyel until the authorities had legalized his entry into France, a matter which was still under negotiation.

Affectionately, again and again, we slapped each other on the back. Then Picasso said he was hungry and we sat down to lunch. A majestic butler poured out exquisite wines. Neruda reviled the Chilean dictator Videla and described how friends had hidden him, Neruda, from the police and how he had made his way across the frontier. He praised the burgundy but declared that there were even better wines in Chile. After lunch he nodded off.

He appeared at the congress on the last day, without his moustache. On his entry and departure he received loud ovations. Not everyone, of course, had read his work, but everyone knew that he was a famous poet, that he had opposed the dictator, had had to go underground and eventually crossed the Andes (some said on foot, others held that it was on a horse or a donkey). How people love romanticism! Even the most dessicated soul responds to it. And in the hall there were many young people who shouted at the top of their voices in

their enthusiasm: there, before them, on the platform was a poet and a hero, and he was reciting poetry, not giving a report by the organizing committee or even a speech about the United Nations.

When the congress was over I had no opportunity to stroll about Paris and relax. The French Partisans of Peace asked Fadeyev to speak at Limoges and me at Dijon. I thought everything would go off peacefully and comforted myself with the thought that I should be visiting a town I liked.

In Dijon I was told immediately that my arrival was dynamite. The young Gaullists intended to shout me down that night and there was bound to be a scuffle. There was an amusing story in the local newspaper which I was shown. A municipal councillor, a Communist, had suggested that I should be given a civic reception at the Town Hall. This had led to animated discussions in the Council. The mayor of Dijon was a Catholic, Canon Kir, who later showed himself a man of some courage and an ardent advocate of peace. During the years of the Nazi occupation he had conducted himself with exemplary patriotism and had been condemned to be shot. In 1949, however, like many others, he had succumbed to the anti-Soviet campaign and opposed, though in temperate language, the Communist councillor's suggestion. Other right-wing councillors used the arguments of *L'Epoque* and *L'Aurore*, called *The Fall of Paris* a 'dirty, libellous book' and said that the peace congress had been organized by Moscow in order to lull the vigilance of the French and that the Soviet Army was preparing to march on Paris. Towards midnight the vote was taken. Eighteen councillors – 'Independents' and Gaullists – voted against the proposal, six Communists voted in favour and five Socialists abstained. It was this last that I found so funny. One can abstain from voting on some law, some resolution or even on a regulation, but the question here was whether or not to entertain a foreign writer in the Town Hall – and the Socialists abstained. I could not help laughing, but the members of the Dijon peace movement said it was no laughing matter, because the Gaullists were determined to stage a fight in the Salle de Flore. Taking advantage of an hour's leisure I went to look at the gargoyles of Notre-Dame.

When I entered the hall for the meeting it was so packed that people could not move. Suddenly the lights went out. Whether or not this was sabotage, as my Dijon friends alleged, or just a technical fault, it made the situation more tense. Candles were brought on to the

platform. There was a loud rumble of voices in the hall. It would have been easy enough to start a fight in the dark and then everybody would have had to leave. I decided on a stratagem. I began by saying that I had come to Dijon even though I was in France for only a few days. I was an officer of the Légion d'honneur but the authorities had refused to extend my visa. The distinction had been conferred on me in the war years by General de Gaulle. There was applause from the back of the hall. Another candle was brought in, and one of the local people whispered to me: 'It's the Gaullists who're clapping. I know where they're sitting'. The general's young followers had evidently been nonplussed and did not quite know how to react. The evening ended quite peacefully.

My Dijon friends wanted to take me to the wine-producing region of Vosne-Romanée, Vougeot and Nuits-St-Georges. I was due to speak in Paris the next evening and had to leave Dijon not later than two o'clock. We set out very early, and all I could get at the hotel by way of breakfast was a cup of black coffee. We visited the places where my companions knew the growers. We were hospitably received, shown over the vineyards and cellars and were offered wine. I am fond of burgundy but it has to be drunk with a meal, as an accompaniment to meat or cheese, while here I was sampling it on an empty stomach. I was afraid it would make me drunk but nevertheless did my part manfully, for to have refused would have hurt the feelings of people who took as much pride in their bottles as a painter does in his pictures.

In Nuits-St-Georges I was taken to the house of a rich lady who owned large vineyards. At first she eyed me mistrustfully, and even observed that she preferred red wine to red ideas. She knew nothing about the congress: 'I don't read the papers. They're so full of horrors that you're driven out of your mind. And I have to see to the wine. What I like reading is novels; even if the hero dies there's beauty and nobility in it'. She brought out some bottles but fortunately also produced bread and cheese. She was pleased when she saw that I knew something about wine and spotted the best vintages. One of my companions explained that I had lived in France many years and had written a novel called *The Fall of Paris*. The woman exclaimed in amazement: 'But I've read that book! It's terribly sad, I actually cried when the poor actress was killed'. She bustled out and returned with a bottle thickly covered with dust: 'This is the best wine in Nuits. By pure chance one bottle has survived. I wanted to give it to Canon

Kir, but I'm sure he won't mind when I tell him that I offered it to a Russian writer – he told me that the Russians fought magnificently'.

The moment I reached Paris I had to go to the Salle de la Mutualité. I was going to speak in the same hall where in 1935 the Anti-Fascist Congress of Writers had held its meetings. The talk had been organized by the Franco-Soviet Society. I found no difficulty in speaking. When I had finished Eluard came up to me and said: 'You know, in a fortnight's time I plan to go with Farge to Greece, to the area which our fellows are still holding. Isn't that good?'

The next day I spoke in Versailles. I did not know beforehand what kind of welcome I should get: Versailles is a place where civil servants, army officers and *rentiers* live. The chairman of the meeting was one of the leading lights of the Friendship Society, an honorary director of the Banque de France, Emile Labeyrie. He was long past his youth but was still glowing with the latent fire which one finds in men of the nineteenth century. On the walls of his very modest flat I saw remarkable paintings and drawings, he was obviously interested in art. (Ten years later, when he came to Moscow and I invited him to my home, he brought me a Corot drawing. I did not want to accept such a valuable present: 'Why should you think of giving it to me?' He smiled: 'Because I'm old and because I've taken to you'.) I spoke at the meeting about the friendship of our two nations, about the oneness of culture, about peace, and the whole thing went down far better and more easily than I had expected.

Nine Soviet delegates, including myself, were elected to the permanent committee of the congress. When I was saying goodbye to Yves Farge he said: 'Tell your friends that it's against the enemies of peace that one's got to fight and not against pacifists or the sort of people who, though they don't agree either with the Communists or with me, sincerely want peace and are prepared to join our movement'. I said that I entirely agreed with him.

On the plane I reviewed the congress in my mind. I had liked the people I met (some of them afterwards became firm friends). And the whole undertaking was an honourable one: that of trying to convince everybody that a third world war would annihilate civilization.

The cold war penetrated into people's every pore. In Washington the infamous Committee on Un-American Activities was hard at work. Anyone daring to pronounce the word 'peace' was charged with 'Communist sympathies'. On the day I left Paris *France-Soir* carried a

short item on the arrest of 'four young Communists who had shouted "We Want Peace!" and other insulting words outside the American Embassy.'

And here was the small Soviet Ilyushin. I read *Pravda* of 1st May. It had an article by a literary man expressing harsh views on western writers: Sinclair Lewis was said to have 'a dirty, petty soul', Hemingway was a 'snob who had lost his conscience' and Feuchtwanger 'a literary trafficker'. This was unjust and stupid: in those years we seemed to be positively pushing people into the arms of the apologists of the American 'investigators'. I recalled what Farge had said. Of course, no one in our country wanted war, neither the Soviet people as a whole nor Stalin. But it had become almost obligatory to revile the West, so people were zealously doing it.

At the time I naturally had no inkling that the Paris congress was to open a new chapter in my life and that I would be giving more of my time to congresses, conferences and council meetings than to my professional work. I have performed this task willingly enough and still do so today. Fifteen years have passed since the Paris congress. The peace movement has been through phases of romanticism and of bureaucracy, has known victories and defeats, it has taken wise decisions and made foolish mistakes, but it has become a real force.

As I write these lines the whole world's attention is focussed on the nuclear test ban treaty. Joliot-Curie said to me once: 'A businessman making a fortune out of uranium doesn't care what happens after he's gone, but people who mind about the future and are prepared to make sacrifices to enable the younger generation of the twentieth century to live decent, just and humane lives, mustn't kill or maim their great-grandchildren'.

Sharing the joy of millions of people I think of the modest but noble contributions made by the world peace movement. During the sombre dangerous years it spoke in the language of human solidarity. I am happy to think that in that ocean of goodwill there is a drop of my own years. And it all began in Paris, in that radiant but joyless spring of 1949.

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IN PARIS I was invited to lunch by Adolf Hoffmeister, an old friend of mine, an artist and a writer, and at that time the Czechoslovak ambassador. The painter Josef Šíma was also there; he had lived in Paris all his life and had now suddenly become a diplomat – he was the cultural attaché. What we talked about was not politics but art, the days of our youth, Prague, Hoffmeister drawing Nezval with a lyre and myself sitting on a suitcase. He told me that they would like me to go to Prague and give a report on the congress. As in those days there was no direct airline between Paris and Moscow and one had to spend a night in Prague anyway, I agreed.

At Prague airport a young man said to me: 'Your meeting is arranged for tomorrow. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Clementis would like you to come and see him tonight'.

I lived in an epoch when fate was constantly reshuffling the cards. Many of the friends of my youth turned up in unexpected posts. As I sat in the office of the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs I recalled the circumstances of my first meeting with Vladimir Clementis.

It was in Bratislava in January 1928. The young journalists on the staff of the local *Pravda* and the leading spirit of the literary and art journal *Dav*, Vlado Clementis, took me 'under the dry twig'. (In Bratislava during one week in the year every wine-grower had the right to sell his wine to be drunk on the premises, during which time he hung a dry twig over the door.) The room was crowded and noisy: musicians and people selling ring-shaped rolls and smoked cheese went to and fro. Some young Slovak writers sat at our table. I was plied with questions about Mayakovsky, Constructivism, the industrialization of the Soviet Union, and what Eisenstein, Meyerhold and Tatlin were up to. Clementis was talking about the triumph of Marxism when he suddenly burst out singing the song about Janošek who robbed the rich to distribute the loot among the poor. Everybody joined in. 'That's how we Slovaks are,' Clementis said at the end of the song, with a smile in which I sensed a little embarrassment as well as pride.

The Minister's flat was cluttered up with someone else's heavy furniture. We dined. Clementis asked me about the congress and then went on to talk about Berlin and the people in America who seemed intent on war. He had changed a good deal in the few years since I had seen him, having grown stouter and sterner. Looking at him I thought that being a Minister must be an uneasy job.

Lida, his wife, brought us a bottle. Sipping from the tiny glass I suddenly recalled aloud: 'In Tisovec your father had a lovely peach brandy and there was also a herb-flavoured vodka which I called *zubrovka*'. Vlado brightened visibly and seemed to come to life. We began exchanging reminiscences, pleasurable trivia as tenuous as gossamers in an autumn forest. We made no further reference to the impending Four-Power Conference of Foreign Ministers and carefully skirted all the things that were troubling us. All we did was to recall old friends, old arguments and old jokes. Only when I was about to leave Vlado suddenly said: 'D'you remember my coming to see you in the rue du Cotentin in 1939? You were ill. We talked politics and then you recited your poem *Loyalty*. And it's quite true: our only salvation lies in loyalty'.

I happen to have kept a volume of the *Literary Encyclopedia* published in 1930. It contains this entry: '*Dav* – a Slovak literary and political weekly journal published in Bratislava which brings together revolutionary Slovak writers, mainly Communists. It is collectively edited under the leadership of a talented young journalist, the Communist Vladimir Clementis'. The encyclopedia names among the contributors to *Dav* Ján Poničan, Laco Novomeský, Jilemnický and Daniil Okaly.

In Prague I was told that *Dav* was something like the Slovak equivalent of *Devetsila*. I had met the *Devetsila* people as far back as the end of 1923; among them were such well-known writers as Nezval, Vančura, Bibl, Halas and Seifert, as well as various talented painters, producers and architects. In the late twenties they used to talk a lot about the relation of Constructivism to Communism, they were excited about industrial aesthetics, photomontage, the juxtaposition of images; they admired Mayakovsky, Picasso, Le Corbusier, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Aragon. The theoretician of *Devetsila* was Taige, a genial though rather dogmatic schoolmaster with quixotic enthusiasms; he managed to find Marxist interpretations of Khlebnikov's 'trans-sense' language and Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*. Czechoslovakia was a rich

industrial country where the Communists exercised a strong influence. Many different winds blew through Prague. The *Devetsila* painters went to Paris. Nezval was fascinated by André Breton. But Slovakia was rather like a backward province in pre-revolutionary Russia. The leader of *Dav* was Vlado Clementis, a Communist, the son of a village teacher. His eyes were fixed on Moscow: to the *Dav* group any member of LEF was a greater authority than all the Surrealists put together.

In January 1928 I spent exactly one week in Slovakia. Clementis did his best to persuade me to come in summer when he would show me the country. I said I would try, for I had found the Slovaks a people after my own heart: completely disinterested, to the point of that naivety which you so often find in the generous-hearted.

On my return to Paris I received a parcel and a letter from Clementis. He sent me some Slovak peasant pipes called *zapekačky* and said in his letter: 'The *zapekačka* which is separately wrapped came into my hands in a curious way. I went to an old man, an inveterate pipe-smoker, and told him what I was looking for, whereupon he took his own pipe out of his mouth and gave it to me. He said he had been smoking it for thirty years but would like to give it to you because he loved the Russians (naturally in the old way, the way our fathers did). This pipe was associated for him with a particular incident which had happened twenty-seven years ago. He was busy painting his roof. The *zapekačka* must not be lit like an ordinary pipe or you get a damp dottle. But there was no means of lighting it on the roof in the proper way, so he chain smoked one pipe after another. During the night he suddenly remembered that a damp dottle had formed in his pipe, so he got up and went into the yard to give it to the labourer Juro who liked to chew tobacco. Juro was not there. He went into the barn, and all of a sudden he heard the sound of splashing. He rushed to the well and saw that his son, a three-year old child, had fallen in and was still struggling, holding on to the cross-beam. He pulled him out. Now his son is our village doctor. That is the whole story. It is not literature, of course, but I promised the old man to pass it on to you along with the pipe'.

I read Clementis' letter to my friends, I used it in an essay. The pipe broke long ago, but the story about the old Slovak giving away his cherished pipe because he 'loved the Russians' moves me still today. Clementis' qualification 'in the old way, the way our fathers did' moves

me too: in this nice distinction one can trace the history of *Dav*, the fate of Clementis, of Novomeský and of many of my friends.

In the summer of 1928 I went to Slovakia again. The members of *Dav* took me about the country, to the remote villages of Orava, the Tatra mountains, Prešov, Bardejov, Košice, to baroque Hungarian monasteries and shepherds' huts in the hill. Clementis was right: it seems to me that in those days it was only in Slovakia that the word 'Russian' opened all doors. To be sure, this love was of a diverse nature. In Turčiansky Sveti Martin there were still some old Orthodox Slavophiles. When I went to the cemetery I saw the graves of the first educators with Russian epitaphs. In the Slavonic Cultural Foundation there were portraits of Pushkin and Lermontov. I walked along Gogol Street. Under the Hapsburgs Bohemia had been part of Austria, and the Austrians had done their best to Germanise the Czechs; but the native intelligentsia clung to its mother tongue and to its rich cultural heritage. As for the Hungarians who ruled Slovakia, instead of building factories they spent their time drinking the potent *assa* wine in the restaurants of Bratislava and Košice and set more store by priests and gendarmes than by teachers. (Before the First World War the majority of Slovak peasants were illiterate.) All the hopes of Slovak patriots were pinned on Russia. In Turčiansky Sveti Martin the inhabitants were familiar with Pushkin and Khomyakov, and they revered both Tolstoy and General Skobelev. Many of the active members of the Slavonic Cultural Foundation regarded the October Revolution as an incomprehensible and ephemeral event. I remember a greyheaded man of letters complaining to me: 'They sent us some poems from Moscow. It's extraordinary how they can publish such things. I was told the author committed suicide. He may have had talent but he certainly didn't write good Russian. Pushkin's language is quite different. Let's see now, what was the author's name — Yessenin'. (I do not know whether these Slavophiles survived till the forties or how they behaved: did they try to 'liberate their Russian brothers' with Hitler's help, or did they begin to see the light? It is possible that some of them aided the Slovak rebels.)

The members of *Dav* loved Russia in a different way: they loved the men who made the October Revolution; they read Mayakovsky, Yessenin and Pasternak. In their enthusiasm for Mayakovsky, for the theories of LEF and for modern art there was a streak of rebellious romanticism. I do not believe I have ever seen anywhere else such a

fondness for ornamentation, for traditional national costume, as in the Slovak villages: the peasants decorated not only their stoves but the very crosses in the graveyards; and now their children had developed a passion for bare, rational, dry Constructivism.

(In 1950 I found Slovakia quite changed. The national costumes, no longer in common use, had fetched up in the wardrobes of theatrical companies; everywhere new houses, large factories and power-stations had sprung up. The smoke-filled chimneyless huts had disappeared, together with the brightly coloured little aprons worn by the young male peasants, the ornamented stoves and pictures on glass. But looking down at the valley of the Váh, brilliant with electric lights, I did not feel any regrets for the past.)

On that first visit to Slovakia in 1928 I found a country without towns. Of course there were Slovak writers living in Bratislava where journals and newspapers were published, but there were more Germans and Hungarians than Slovaks in the town. In Košice I heard Slovak spoken only in the market to which the peasants came. The small German towns of Levoča and Kežmarok, with their guildhalls and gothic churches, and their orderly subscribers to *Die Woche* seemed to have come from another world. But the small towns inhabited by the Slovaks – Brezno, Zvolen, Ružomberok, Turčiansky Svätý Martin – were more like large villages: a few town houses and, next door, cottages, kitchen-gardens and geese. The whole Slovak intelligentsia was bound up with village life. In Jasenová I was taken into the cottage where Kukučín, one of the founders of Slovak literature, was born. In a similar cottage I met Jilemnický who was busy writing a novel. Once I went to Slovakia in the winter, and the poet Laco Novomeský took me to spend Christmas in Senica, the village where his parents and grandmother lived. The young *Dav* poet, Ivan Horvat, joined us there. We were treated to the traditional Christmas fare. But what Novomeský and Horvat discussed was the work of Mayakovsky, Nezval, Aragon and Pasternak. I went with Clementis to his native village of Tisovec, where his parents fussed over us hospitably with cream-cheese dumplings, *slivovice* and *zubrovka*. The members of *Dav* thought about industrial aesthetics while at the same time loving the Slovak peasant, illiterate but noble, who had not passed through the soul-destroying furnace of capitalism. It was this that constituted the unique quality of the *Dav* group and created difficulties for them. Clementis could sing about an old shepherd who leads his flock into

the mountains for the last time, or about Janošek; he could admire the beauty of an old dipper, but more than once he pointed out to me that I still clung to 'a number of idealistic errors' and ought to approach a given matter in 'a Marxist way'.

I remember a conversation we had in a mountain hut above Tisovec. Vlado was talking about his path in life. At that time he was writing about poetry and was wholly involved in literature; I saw him as a promising young author. We sat looking down at the valley, the old trees, the cottages barely visible among the leafy gardens. Clementis said that the main thing was struggle: until the Czechoslovaks overthrew capitalism there would be no justice for all, no real art: 'My work is the Party'.

In 1940 to 1941 Vlado was in a camp in the north of Scotland. He devoted some of his enforced leisure to writing reminiscences for his wife Lida about his childhood and youth, his parents and his native Tisovec. Today these notes have been published under the title *An Unfinished Chronicle*. The book shows clearly enough how much of an artist the author was, yet for him the writing of it was no more than a brief foray, an interregnum between shouldering a soldier's rifle and carrying a Minister's portfolio.

One can tell that Laco Novomeský is a poet without having read his work: you have only to spend a few minutes with him, or simply look at him. But to measure his life by the usual yardstick is to realize that the greater part of it has been spent in political activity. From 1925 to 1939 he worked on Party newspapers. During the occupation he was a member of the illegal Central Committee of the Czech Communist Party which organized the Slovak uprising. After the victory he was not only on the Central Committee but Minister for National Education. Nevertheless, his real passion was poetry. Conscience for him was no casual companion but an unremitting mentor. In the course of a war an architect may find himself in a sappers' unit blowing up bridges; that may be his duty but it is not his calling.

Although these two men, Clementis and Novomeský, were so very unlike, they were firm friends and their destinies had much in common.

In 1936, on the initiative of *Day*, a meeting of Slovak writers was held at the small spa of Trenčanská-Teplice. At the time I was working in the secretariat of the International Association of Anti-Fascist Writers and attended this meeting with a view to inviting the Slovaks to join the Association. The writers who came to this meeting were of

many different trends; some of them later supported the Catholic Separatists who staked everything on Hitler's victory, others joined the resistance movement or fought as partisans. Clementis and his *Dav* friends persuaded all those who attended the meeting to join the Anti-Fascist Association. One day we went to a village where we were given a great feast, after which there was singing, and one old man, raising his clenched fist, said that the Russians would beat the fascists. It made me say to Vlado: 'It's exactly like in Spain'.

The Spanish war began soon after that. In 1937 I met Novomeský in Valencia. We discussed the fighting, the Non-Intervention Committee, the International Brigade, and only for a moment did the memory of Vlado, the cottages, the luminous green of Slovakia come back to me. Laco wrote these lines: 'I wanted to count the flocks of stars before they were burnt out, but then st-t-t-tars – machine-guns started rattling; new stars flew up to join the old, st-t-t-tars, oh heavens! Stars'.

Then came Munich. The Nazis occupied Prague. The world darkened.

When the 'phony war' began I was ill and in Paris. I had few visitors: some of them were disgusted by the Non-Aggression Pact, others were afraid of the *flics*. Vlado and Lida, deeply disturbed and sad, came to see me in September. Later Vlado came again; he was depressed but nevertheless tried to cheer me up: loyalty was a talisman with which he never parted. In October, the French arrested him and sent him to a concentration camp. On the eve of the French collapse I saw him in soldier's uniform: he wanted to fight the Nazis but Pétain's France capitulated.

The next time we met was in 1944 in Moscow. Clementis had become an important politician. He said that the British and Americans dreaded a Soviet victory and were busy plotting; he was gay and felt confident that the idea to which he had dedicated his life would triumph. When we turned to reminiscences of the old days I felt as if I were no longer in Gorky Street but in the hut above Tisovec where an old shepherd had given me an acrid *zapekačka* to smoke.

In February 1948 a literary evening was organized at the Writers' Club to mark the 40th anniversary of my work. The Czechoslovak ambassador Jiří Gorek handed me a telegram from 'Secretary of State Clementis': 'Dear Ilya, we toast you in Tisovec *žubrovka*. Vlado and Lida'.

I have already described our last meeting. Afterwards I recalled that Vlado's eyes had looked sad. Had he simply been tired after a long day's work, or did he know that the ring of calumny was tightening round him?

A year later in Prague, where the World Council of Peace had its headquarters, I learnt from Hoffmeister that Lida, Novomeský and Ivan Horvat (until then ambassador in Budapest) had been arrested.

Lida was freed two years later. I ran into her in the street in Prague and wanted to stop her, but she pressed my hand saying: 'You mustn't talk to me', and hurried away.

Novomeský and Ivan Horvat were also released. I met Novomeský in Prague; he was doing translations but his poetry was not published. Ivan Horvat died soon afterwards.

In the book of poems some of which Novomeský wrote in prison and some after his release there is one poem called *Wisdom*: 'It is better to go down on one's knees than to stand at the stake; better to hide the truth at the bottom of one's heart, as in a casket. Comrade Galileo, what do you think, is this perhaps wisdom? Yet wiser than any sage was the lively lad in the fairy-tale who cried out loud: "The emperor is naked, completely naked!" It was terrible how loudly he cried'.

Years went by. There were many changes in the world. Then came the spring of 1963 when Laco Novomeský was enthusiastically welcomed at a writers' congress. Okaly wrote to me saying: 'You probably know that the organizer and leading spirit of *Dav*, Vlado Clementis, falsely accused of espionage, was executed. I myself and other comrades were released after ten years' imprisonment. Now that the injustices are being wiped out, they are revising their attitude to *Dav* and its importance to our literature and culture in the broad sense of the word'. On my desk as I write there is a Slovak journal with Vlado's photograph. Looking at it I recall how in 1949 he recited my verses: '... They will pass over you. Loyalty to the heart and loyalty to fate ...' On the eve of his execution he wrote to Lida that he was dying as he had lived: an honest Communist.

There are periods when people can think in the terms of their own destinies and the details of their own lives, but the period we lived in compelled the finest people to think in terms of history. Falsehood can be all-pervading and all-powerful but happily it is not everlasting. Good men may perish, lives may be crippled and yet in the end truth prevails. For Vlado, as for some of my Soviet friends, the period was,

indeed, a bitter one; but for history, in which Clementis put his faith, it was a period of triumphs.

Just now my thoughts go back to the evening 'under the dry twig' when the young Slovak writers were singing the song about Janošek. Some of them have disappeared, others have endured great adversity and have aged before their time. I recall the hut above Tisovec, the young Vlado, his beautifully clear, shining eyes and his words about struggle; twilight falls, everything grows softly blue, and over the gentle rounded hills the pale evening star glimmers faintly.

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'How DID you spend your last evening in Paris?' Fadeyev asked me. With old friends, I said. 'While I was being pestered to death by an American who wanted everything explained to him . . . Ah, my friend!' He broke off: 'Let's have some cognac'. I glanced at him: he looked mellow and sad, his expression was quite unlike that he usually wore at meetings and conferences.

It is said of Fadeyev that he was greatly talented and intelligent, that he had an iron will and that Stalin had thought highly of him. That is all quite true, but in his case 'talent' stood for far more than a writer's natural gift: for him it meant the capacity to make hundreds of corrections on a single page of manuscript, it meant inner torment, a spiritual make-up utterly unsuited to the kind of public activity in which he engaged so unflaggingly and devotedly. All our writers and, I feel sure, all the leaders of the peace movement were familiar with his glance – clear and cold – with his erudition, his remarkable memory, his ability to give depth and brilliance to a phrase by Stalin or Zhdanov and to endow it with the qualities of a literary polemic and the incontrovertibility of law. But the Fadeyev I want to speak about is less well known.

I first met him a long time ago, in the days when he was one of the leading spirits of RAPP. From time to time we ran into each other in Moscow, and, later, in Madrid and Paris. I liked his book *The Nineteen* but I did not understand, or rather did not know the man. And in 1940 when I had talks with him I regarded him as a boss rather than a fellow-writer. For his part, as he confessed on one occasion recalling the past: 'I took you for someone very remote from us. In Madrid I said to the army people who were sticking up for you: "He may be willing to die for our cause but he doesn't want to live with us, and what's more, he wouldn't know how to"'.

After the war we began to look at each other more closely. In Penza, during the Belinsky celebrations, we spent a whole evening talking. Later we met again in Moscow and discussed books and the destiny of the writer. It gradually dawned on me that Fadeyev was not quite

what he had seemed at first, but it was only during the five or six years that we worked together in the peace movement that I really got to know him. We talked in planes and in railway carriages, and in such towns as Oslo, Vienna and Prague. He would come into my room at night and talk and talk and talk. That is what made me start writing about him after describing the Paris congress.

It would be too much to say that we became friends; we were too unlike for that, which may also have been the reason why Fadeyev was at times more open with me than with people closer to him. He evidently still had a lingering feeling that I was someone remote and he spoke very frankly about things. He had many friends (by which I do not mean the lickspittles who toadied to the man in power, but people who were sincerely attached to him), yet there seemed to be many questions which he did not discuss with his friends. 'There's nothing anyone can tell me about loneliness,' he said once. He was on familiar terms with a number of people who called him 'Sasha', but he and I always addressed one another formally by name and patronymic.

It is not easy to tell Fadeyev's story: his was a very complicated nature and it is clear that much must have escaped his notice. Besides, the events are too recent. I do not want to indulge in speculations and shall confine myself to quoting extracts from my notes and some of his own words from memory in order to show his attitude to certain things, to dispel the myth of 'the man of iron' and to give some help to the future biographer of a man who played an important part in the history of our literary life.

Fadeyev worked in the literary field for thirty-five years, yet all there is to show for it are two complete and two unfinished novels, a few short stories and some hundreds of articles. 'They won't let me write,' he would complain. 'It's the Writers' Union, the struggle for peace, conferences, meetings, congresses all the time.' And, indeed, the duties involved in directing the writers' organizations and his work in the peace movement took up a great deal of his time; yet he did it of his own free will and was under no compulsion, and when in the last years he was relieved of some of his functions instead of welcoming it he felt extremely annoyed. He worked tirelessly inside the peace movement, going into every detail. By chance I have kept a few of the notes he passed to me at some of the meetings. They are full and precise: asking me to have a talk with Nenni; anxious about the length of an American delegate's speech, calculated to last an hour and a half,

and suggesting that I should ask him to shorten it; putting forward ideas for broadening the movement.

It has also been said that Fadeyev wrote so little because he drank so much. But Faulkner drank far more and yet wrote dozens of books. It must have been something different that obstructed Fadeyev.

I once told him that of all his writings I liked best *The Nineteen*, his first novel written when he was twenty-three. 'That's quite natural,' he said. '*The Nineteen* is based on personal experience. Of course a sense of one's responsibility can be inspiring but there are times when it's a hindrance.'

For twelve years, he would take up his *Posledniy iz Udege* (The Last of the Udege) almost every year, replanning and correcting it, but in the end he considered it a failure.

When he began writing *Molodaya Gvardia* (The Young Guard) he was no longer twenty-three but forty-four. The story of the young people of Krasnodon moved him deeply for it brought back his own youth, and although he always chose to regard himself as a realist there was a good deal of the romantic in him.

(The fate of *The Young Guard* is closely linked with what we call the 'personality cult'. The novel was written and published, it had a great success and was awarded a Stalin Prize. One of Fadeyev's friends, S. A. Gerasimov, made a film of it. And that is when the storm broke. Stalin had not read the book but the film made him very angry: here were youngsters left to their fate in a town seized by the Nazis. Where was the Komsomol organization? Where the Party leadership? Stalin was told that the film-director had followed the text of the novel. Sharp criticism of *The Young Guard* followed in the press. Fadeyev replied in a letter to *Pravda* accepting the criticism as well-deserved and promising to make suitable changes in the book. When I met him he said he was not altering the text but was writing additional chapters about old Bolsheviks and the role of the Party leadership. After a short pause he added: 'Of course, even if I do succeed, the novel won't be the same. Still, it may be that I'm too easily swayed by enthusiasm for partisan activities. Times are hard and Stalin knows better than you or I'.)

The reason why I have mentioned *The Young Guard* is because it sheds light on Fadeyev's attitude as a novelist to reality. When he was planning the novel he went to Krasnodon where he questioned hundreds of people in an attempt to reconstruct the events and the personal appearance of his characters; he was tremendously disappointed when

he could not get a clear description of several of them. This shows the extent to which the rules he set himself were those of the chronicler rather than of the poet. Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* grew out of a newspaper report on an ambitious young man's crime; what the writer did was to make use of the plot without letting his interpretation of Julien Sorel depend on 'facts'. Stendhal never elaborated the description of his characters' personal appearance; he left that to the reader's imagination. Zola on the other hand said that he 'lacked imagination'; he studied the details of the kind of life he wanted to depict or, as we say, 'collected material'. For the first time in his life when he was writing *Nana* he visited a brothel – armed with a notebook. Fadeyev's teacher was Leo Tolstoy: when he wanted to bring out the nature of one of his characters he stressed some particular physical trait. But whereas the realism which Tolstoy gave to Karenin's ears is such that from that detail alone we seem to know him better than we know our close friends, Fadeyev wanted to put down every single feature of every one of the young Krasnodon heroes.

I remember a talk we had in a plane. Fadeyev said he had come to the end of the road and went on to describe the fate of his unfinished novel *Chornaya Metallurgiya* (Black Metallurgy): 'In fifty-one Malenkov sent for me and said: "There's a new invention in metallurgy which will revolutionize the whole thing. A magnificent discovery. You'll render the Party a great service by describing it". At the same time he told me about the unmasking of a group of saboteur geologists. I got down to work. I made long trips to the Urals and didn't hurry over the writing. I'd got some hundreds of pages written and was beginning to see it as a real novel, the one thing for which I could feel answerable. And then it turned out that the "invention" was a swindle which had cost the State hundreds of millions of roubles, and that the geologists implicated had been victims of calumny and they were rehabilitated. So the novel was a total loss'. I was astounded: 'What do you mean? I've read extracts from it in *Ogonyok*, it's splendid stuff. Make a few alterations. Get them to invent something else. It's not metallurgy you're writing about, it's people'. Until that moment I had seen Fadeyev really angry only twice before. Usually very self-possessed and cool, he went red in the face and shouted in a high-pitched voice when roused. Now in the plane he began to shout: 'It's all right for you. When you describe an engineer in love, you don't care what he's doing at the factory. But my novel's based on facts'.

When he had calmed down he said quietly: 'All there's left is to do away with the manuscript, and myself as well – I shall never start on another book now'.

It is not, of course, to take issue with the late Fadeyev that I have described his dependence on reality. He was a true writer, and a very self-critical one. Yet this capacity for self-criticism is not enough to account for the long time he took to write *The Last of the Udege* and *Black Metallurgy*; this was bound up with the whole pattern of his life, with his contradictions, with the conflict between the partisan and the disciplined soldier. 'Many writers feel hurt and resent me,' he once said to me. 'I can understand them, but it's hard to explain.' 'Tell them,' I suggested, 'that the person you hurt most is the writer Fadeyev.'

In his early youth he had been a partisan in the Far East and later he took part in putting down the Kronstadt mutiny. He was seventeen when he joined the Party, and twenty when the Chita organization sent him as a delegate to the 10th Party Congress. For him Trotsky and the 'Workers' Opposition' were not pages in the *Short Course*¹, but living memories. In the lives of some writers political struggle was no more than a passionate episode lasting a few months or years; for Fadeyev politics was his entire life's work.

I remember a small meeting of the 'active group' of the World Peace Council. It was held in Prague, in a suburban villa where Joliot-Curie was staying. We were discussing our further activities: the success of the Stockholm Appeal had gone to our heads; we talked about the need to collect signatures. Fadeyev had come with a resolution demanding that the five Great Powers should sign a peace pact. After listening to various speeches he proved with great brilliance that everything the others had advanced would in effect be covered by this Five Power pact: economic difficulties, violations of national sovereignty, the fear of war and of a lapse into savagery. The idea was not his own but he presented it so ably that the small room in which some ten to fifteen people were gathered rang with loud applause as though it were a public meeting. Joliot-Curie suggested having Fadeyev's speech printed and circulated to all the national committees.

In the summer of 1956, when I was in Paris, Joliot-Curie invited

¹ *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). A Short Course.*

me to his house. We talked for a long time about the 20th Party Congress and about all the things that in those days gladdened and interested us intensely. Then Joliot-Curie said: 'Fadeyev – he's shown his extraordinary will power in this too. It's a great loss for us. He was brusque at times and I've had some difficult moments with him. But I've always admired his intelligence. It was his way of thinking in political terms that won me over. Bernal and I reason as scientists. You I always see as a writer. And not you alone. Take d'Astier: many people think of him as a politician, but he's a poet, although I believe he doesn't write poetry. But talking to Fadeyev I've often thought that his true calling was politics'.

I cannot, naturally, share this last opinion. I know not only Fadeyev's books, I also knew their author and realized that he could not be seen apart from his art. But Joliot-Curie was right when he said that Fadeyev thought in political terms. It was this that determined the dual character of his judgments and gave rise to the contradictions which people who had suffered from them mistook for hypocrisy.

It was a matter of faith with Fadeyev that Stalin was an able statesman who knew exactly what ought to be done and could see far into the future. There were, however, moments when things got too much for him: in Penza he spoke to me about Meyerhold's fate, and later, a short time before Stalin's death, he recalled Yakir and Stern, saying over and over again: 'They misinform him'. In the late forties, though many things shocked him, he still tried to find an explanation: 'It's an evil tide, but Stalin has it under control'. His faith was not unmixed with fear. He once said half in jest: 'There are two people I'm afraid of – my mother and Stalin. I fear them – and I love them.'

He would say about a book: 'Of course it shows talent. But try to see what I mean: it can't be judged on its literary merits alone. It must also be seen from the point of view of the State, and from that angle the book's harmful'.

I have said that Fadeyev's teacher was Leo Tolstoy; this was obvious to everybody. Long sentences with a number of subordinate clauses were (or had become) natural to him. He could not write in any other way. Sometimes, when he had to telegraph a report on a World Council meeting or a talk with some leader, he would ask me to help him; he would seat himself at a table – his handwriting was very clear – and say: 'You dictate – you know how to put this sort of thing into short sentences.'

But Tolstoy's influence went deeper than the mere technique of writing. In Penza Fadeyev went to great lengths trying to convince me that all one could learn from Chekhov was the art of observation: 'What could he teach? And, anyway, he didn't try to teach. But Tolstoy recognized the true purpose of literature, he was a real teacher. Today, of course, we have different ideas, but I'm still full of admiration for the novel which is now looked upon as a failure. Tolstoy wrote *Resurrection* so that good should triumph over evil.

'And take Dickens. Didn't he champion good in his best novels? Naturally, without the inspiration behind it this would be no more than dull didacticism. You can't turn a hack writer into anything that's worth a hundredth part of Tolstoy, but it's the duty of genius to serve good and humanism. In our age that means subordinating oneself to the task of building Communism.'

This was the bridge linking the writer to the literary functionary: the bridge and at the same time a chasm.

In 1929, when Fadeyev was still one of the RAPP leaders, he published an article entitled *The Highway of Proletarian Literature* in which he called for an approach to the novel as he himself saw it. The categorical tone of his pronouncements was not surprising: in those days the RAPP people attacked not only the 'right-wing fellow-travelers' but even Mayakovsky. The title, *The Highway of Proletarian Literature*, is not unusual in itself: the Romanticists, the Realists, the Naturalists and the Symbolists each regarded their path as new and as the only correct one; it is its ultimate fate that was unusual. RAPP was disbanded; a lot was written about the need for diversity in literary trends, but at the same time a close watch was kept on writers to see that they all followed a single literary road; individual paths were looked upon as deadends. Yet the road, or to use Fadeyev's expression, the highway was far from straight, its zigzags determined not only by important political events but also by Stalin's preferences, his moods, his attitude towards various writers. In 1929 Fadeyev imagined that he was laying out a new road. I do not know how long this illusion survived; but in 1949, annoyed by a critic, he said to me: 'He thinks I'm fault-finding, but I'm nothing more than a traffic-controller'. This, of course, was said in anger. He was not laying out a new road, but neither was he a mere traffic-controller. At times he succeeded in evolving theories that went beyond the accepted formulas. For instance, at one point he gave this definition of Socialist Realism: it

ought to show people not as they are but as they should be. This view may be closer to romanticism than to the realism of the past century, but in that formulation there is both vision and breadth.

In Fadeyev's entourage there were always critics able to seize upon his ideas and reproduce them in their reviews. I remember Fadeyev at a writers' meeting accusing one such critic of perfidy: 'There's an Oriental story about the scorpion and the frog. The scorpion pursued by enemies begs the frog to carry him across a stream. "You'll sting me," says the frog. "Why should I kill you? Death threatens me unless I can get across to the other bank." He persuades the frog. They have almost reached their goal when the scorpion stings the frog and they begin to sink. "Why did you do it?" asks the dying frog. "I don't know, it's my nature," the scorpion replies'. The critic who happened to be sitting next to me said in a loud voice: 'It wasn't the scorpion's nature that did it, he just didn't trust the frog'.

In 1928 Fadeyev sharply attacked Mayakovsky's poem *Khorosho* (Good). In 1938 he called it 'an historic event'. It was not his response to poetry that had changed but his entire approach to literature, and in his speeches he now began to refer to 'State policy'. He was a courageous and disciplined soldier who never forgot the commander-in-chief's prerogatives.

I remember a talk we had after Fadeyev had been inveighing against the 'aloofness from life' of certain writers, among whom he had named Pasternak. We happened to meet in Gorky Street close to where I live. Fadeyev insisted on taking me to a corner café where, after ordering brandy, he said without preamble: 'Would you like to hear some real poetry?' And he began to recite from memory verses by Pasternak, going on and on, and only interrupting himself from time to time to say: 'Wonderful stuff, isn't it?'

He was devoted to poetry, but even more devoted to his own line of conduct, and it was not his fault but his misfortune that during a quarter of a century, as for millions of his contemporaries, his loyalty to 'the idea' was inextricably bound up with Stalin's every word, whether just or unjust. Undoubtedly Fadeyev knew that Babel was no 'spy', that Zoshchenko was no 'enemy', that Stalin's dislike of Platonov and Grossman was unfounded, but he also knew that for many millions of courageous and self-sacrificing people Stalin's word was law. 'I was wounded twice during the Civil War,' Fadeyev told me at our last meeting. 'The doctors said the wounds were bad, but I was young.

And how can one compare a scrap of metal with what one has had to suffer later on?’

Sometimes when talking to me in a confidential mood he would break off with some inconsequential remark like: ‘D’you know the painter I really like? Renoir’. And, seeing my amazement, he would add: ‘though I must confess I’m colour blind’, and give one of his unforgettable laughs.

He seemed stern but I often noticed how his look could soften. He tried to help writers who had fallen on bad times. At the beginning of 1938 he showed me several poems by Mandelstam which he wanted to get printed in one of the magazines. He did not succeed. Ten years later he said to me: ‘D’you remember Garry? He was pretty hard on your book *The Second Day*. Well, he’s back from concentration camp now. He’s written an interesting short novel, it reminds me in a way of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. He’s rather hard up. I’m going to try to get it published’. But next time we met he said glumly: ‘Nothing doing about Garry’.

With every passing year his gloom deepened, and his eyes took on a glazed look. He drank heavily and more frequently, mostly in the company of people quite outside the world of letters, evidently seeking oblivion.

In March 1953, soon after Stalin’s death, I came across an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in which Fadeyev sharply attacked Grossman’s *Za Pravoye Delo* (In a Just Cause). This puzzled me because I had several times heard him speak well of this novel which he had managed to get published. It had aroused Stalin’s displeasure and there had been some scathing reviews of it. But Fadeyev had continued to defend it. Grossman had made a few changes in the text. And now suddenly Fadeyev had come out with this article.

The announcement about the rehabilitation of the doctors appeared: changes were obviously in the air. Fadeyev came to me without ringing the bell, sat down on my bed and said: ‘Don’t be too hard on me . . . I was frightened’. ‘But why after his death?’ I asked. ‘I thought the worst was still to come,’ he replied. He afterwards repeated this more than once, driven by some need to do penance. A year later I ran across L. S. Faktor, an interpreter who always accompanied Fadeyev at difficult political talks with the French. ‘There’s something wrong with Fadeyev,’ she said. ‘He came to me several times in a terrible state because he’d written so harshly about Grossman’s novel.’ Late in 1954,

at the Second Congress of Writers, Fadeyev spoke about the novel *In a Just Cause* and his own article about it, and made the public admission: 'I infinitely regret having shown such weakness'.

Fadeyev was physically extremely tough. He ate a lot and drank a lot; he could run a distance of five miles; he spent whole nights at meetings without showing any sign of fatigue. It was only in the last years that his nerves began to give way. In December 1952 he wrote to me: '... I am, alas, still unwell and shall probably have to stay another three weeks in hospital. A stranger looking at you and me would almost certainly put me down as exceptionally strong and you as rather ailing. Actually it's you who enjoy robust health. But mind you take good care of it. Everything depends on one's nerves and there's always a limit. You've never learnt to relax, but you ought to try.'

At our last meeting he said he was ill. 'I've got pain in my legs, I can't walk'; 'I've told you, the novel has gone by the board'; 'As a matter of fact, things are bad.' I did my best to cheer him up by saying that the sickness would pass, that he was ten years younger than I and would live to write several more novels. But he shook his head: 'The engine's stalled'.

Two months later I had a telephone call: 'Fadeyev has committed suicide.'

As always happens in such cases there was a great deal of speculation about what had made him do it; all the good and the bad things about him were recalled. The reasons must have been many: Fadeyev never spared himself throughout his life; so long as the harsh winter prevailed he held out, but once people smiled again he began to ponder on what he had lived through and what he had written, and everything must have suddenly revealed itself to him in a new light. That was when the engine stalled.

Looking back at the post-war years I always see Fadeyev's figure. He was a big man who stood out in any gathering. And everything about the man was big too: his ruthlessness, his tenderness, his faith and his tragedy.

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A TELEPHONE call towards evening informed me that we were due to leave for Rome where a meeting of the permanent committee set up at the Paris congress was being held. This was typical of the methods at that time: decisions were taken and visas applied for at the last moment, and time and again we arrived late. I have already described in an earlier book how we almost suffocated over the Alps on this journey when a thunderstorm forced the pilot to take the plane to too great an altitude. Having left Prague in the morning we landed in Rome at about 10 a.m. Our Italian friends met us at the airport. I had been hoping to have some coffee and a sandwich, but no such luck: it appeared that a copy of some film had been wished on us and the customs detained us for a whole hour. Fadeyev said that we had to go on at once as the meeting had already begun. I listened with only half an ear to what d'Arboussier was saying about the struggle for peace in Black Africa because I was hungry. When the lunch recess was announced a secretary of our embassy said the ambassador was expecting us.

Fadeyev, Wanda Wassilewska and Korneichuk got into the embassy car, while I was given a lift by Emilio Sereni, a Communist deputy. He is a very stout, dark, jovial man. He knows many languages: French, Russian, Spanish, Polish, English, Hebrew, German, Chinese, Arabic and several others that I cannot remember. He had spent many years in fascist prisons and was accustomed to do his thinking while pacing from one corner of the room to another; sometimes in committee he would start pacing and then come out with some interesting thought. If he happened to be sitting next to me during long speeches I was never allowed to get bored for he would whisper amusing stories into my ear. I asked him to stop at a bar where I could drink a cup of coffee at the counter, but he said the ambassador would shortly be giving us a meal and instead of coffee treated me to a glass of pleasantly bitter vermouth.

The ambassador received us in his office; there was no sign of lunch. He explained to Wanda Wassilewska, Fadeyev, Korneichuk

and myself at great length and in great detail that Capitalism was quite unlike Socialism and that when in Rome one could not do as Moscow does. Fadeyev closed his eyes and flushed with suppressed anger. I kept looking at my watch. It was half past one; in an hour's time we were due back at the meeting and if we were not fed I should be unable to hold out. Suddenly Korneichuk interrupted the ambassador: 'You know, we started out at seven this morning without breakfast'.

The embassy canteen was in the basement. There was a strong smell of cabbage. There were no vacant seats and we were asked to wait in a small inner courtyard. I told Korneichuk I would rather go into the town. 'You're crazy,' he said, 'you haven't got a single lira.' I knew I was behaving unreasonably but had made up my mind: I found it insufferable to stand about waiting.

As I came out into the street a tall young man addressed me: 'Aren't you Ilya Ehrenburg? My name's Vishnevsky, I'm a *Tass* correspondent here', and he began to praise my books. 'Let's talk about my books some other time,' I said. 'The point now is can you lend me a few lire, just enough for lunch? We haven't had any money issued to us yet.' Vishnevsky rang up his wife from the restaurant to tell her to join us, but I was already eating *pasta* and drinking wine. It was a heavenly meal, everything seemed to me exceptionally good, perhaps because after the vermouth I was ravenous. And my host turned out to be very interesting: he knew and liked Italy and had a lot to say about the political situation, the new films and the Italian writers.

Naturally I was late getting back to the meeting and asked Korneichuk in a low voice who was the speaker. He growled enviously: 'You smell of wine. So you had lunch all right?'

But people are never satisfied. Smoking was allowed in the hall, and as I had used up all the tobacco in my pouch and still had no Italian money, I started scrounging cigarettes from the other delegates on the pretext of wanting to know what people smoked in Mexico, in the Lebanon or in Sweden.

A quarter of a century had passed since I had last been in Rome. Naturally the Temple of Vesta, the Roman basilicas and the baroque *palazzi* had not altered; it was I who had changed, because now, for the first time I had the necessary equipment for an understanding of the grandeur of this city where twenty centuries peacefully coexist side by side.

A couple of days later I began to realize that, after all, it was not I

alone who had changed; the atmosphere of Rome had changed too. On the political plane there was, of course, little to choose between Italy and France; in both countries there was the same Marshall Aid, the same Atlantic Pact, the powerful Communist Parties, ceaseless strikes, the gradual restoration of the economy, American G.I.s and peace slogans on the walls. But in Paris there had been a general air of glumness, whereas the Italians looked gay. It may have been owing to the same feeling as I myself experienced when I was let out of Butyrki prison at the age of seventeen, for Italy had been held down by fascism for twenty-five years. No repressions could now keep the people in check and setbacks did not cause disillusionment. (After writing these lines I paused to think: have I been quite objective in this comparison? Having lived for so long in Paris – it is a city which I have the right to call my own – while being a mere tourist, a pilgrim in Rome, I naturally know the French far better and observe things in more detail. Also the glumness which I had felt in Paris may have been because it was there that I spent my youth.)

I believe it was on the second day of the committee meeting that the painter Renato Guttuso, with whom I had already become friendly in Wroclaw, gave a dinner party. I met Italian writers, artists and theatrical producers. Guttuso is a man of strong emotions; a true southerner. To this day he is still trying to find himself: he wants to combine truth with beauty and Communism with the kind of art he admires. He questioned me eagerly about Moscow and gazed at Picasso with veneration. He painted large pictures of political subjects and small still-lives (he was particularly keen on potatoes in a woven basket).

Every night he entertained Picasso and me. We dined in different good, very expensive restaurants. There had been some hold-up in the transfer of money and we received it only a day or so before we left. It embarrassed me rather and I would say disingenuously: 'Do please let me pay tonight', and even fumble in my pocket, but with a racing heart: what if Guttuso did not stop me in time? However, he always stayed my hand: 'Leave it to me, you're my guest here'. The people with whom we dined were interesting: poets, painters and theatrical producers; but invariably someone would join us whose profession Guttuso did not mention when he introduced him. I could not make out how Renato came to have so much money. In those days he was not yet famous and I knew he was hard up. It was only as I was leaving for home that he disclosed the truth: each night the man whose pro-

fession he did not mention footed the bill, happy to have the chance of sitting at the same table with Picasso.

One night we were dining at a restaurant in what used to be the ghetto; we were eating *artichauts à la juive* (boiled in olive oil they open out like roses and the leaves become crunchy). There was a beautiful girl from Calabria at another table. 'I want to draw her,' Picasso said suddenly. The girl sat for him and he started to work. Half an hour later he showed us a wonderful drawing, in the manner of Ingres, which he had made on the back of a menu. The girl told us that she was engaged and was to be married very soon. 'Well, show the portrait to your *fiancé*,' said Carlo Levi, 'he's bound to like it.' She was slightly embarrassed: 'I'm afraid he's inclined to be jealous'. We all laughed and someone suggested that she should sell the drawing: 'It'll fetch at least two hundred thousand lire, a good dowry'. 'What a thing to say!' she cried. 'Of course we haven't much money, but we both work. No, I'd rather hang it over the bed.'

A rich patron of the arts gave a reception for the delegates. He invited Picasso, Guttuso and myself to lunch before the reception. Picasso had been to the Vatican in the morning. We were curious to know what he had thought of the Raphaels. 'A great master,' Picasso replied politely, and then suddenly let himself go: 'But Michelangelo's ceiling! I can't get over the way he painted the Sybil's hand'. Our host lived in a *palazzo* and collected old fire-tongs. The delegates – Bulgarians, Senegalese, Japanese – wandered about the handsome reception rooms, glass in hand: it was all rather like some fancy-dress ball of long ago.

Carlo Levi is a writer and a painter (and now a Senator as well). We took to one another at once. He has an air of indolence: he walks slowly and in the heat of conversation will stop suddenly in the middle of a crowded street. One day he was driving me about in his small car. It was the day on which Gagarin made his space flight. We were crossing the Piazza Colonna in the centre. Carlo Levi was discoursing on the concept of infinity and completely forgot about traffic regulations. The policeman on point duty demanded a heavy fine, for we had committed a serious offence. I tried to break into the highly dramatic dialogue by saying: 'In my country the police are more lenient towards writers', in the hope that Carlo Levi's fame would mitigate the crime. The policeman eyed me suspiciously: 'Oh, and what is your country?' 'The Soviet Union, I live in Moscow.' The policeman seized

my hand and shook it fervently: 'Your chap's flown to the moon!' And he let us go without more ado.

Carlo Levi lives near the Pincio in a large untidy studio. He never wakes before ten. He has painted several portraits of me. Even working at his easel he looks lazy, his brush seems barely to touch the canvas, like a cat washing her face with her paw. But goodness, what a lot of pictures he has painted, what a lot of books and articles he has written, this apparently lazy man! In 1949 I read his *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. It is an autobiographical book: the young Carlo, an anti-fascist doctor, is sent into exile to the south, to a poverty-stricken, sparsely populated part of Calabria where people say that 'Christ stopped at Eboli', because even Christ would not venture into this small, really godforsaken place. Carlo Levi describes the life of the poor illiterate peasants and lovingly discloses their spiritual world. The unique quality of this book is that it gives you at once the feeling that it was written by a painter: the landscape, the scenes and the people are visually evoked.

This man, who seems such an indolent dreamer, has managed to accomplish a good deal: he has travelled to distant countries, has taken part in various campaigns and has devoted much time defending that mildest of rebels, Danilo Dolci, whom the Sicilian feudalists were determined to destroy. I believe he gives this impression of indolence because, for him, Time is a pedestrian roaming at leisure – as tireless Dante roamed the Tuscan hills – and not out to break speed records in motor races. Of all his pictures I like best the landscapes with cows, and this is not just a matter of colour; Carlo must love those creatures because they spend their days in deep rumination. Truncated, abstract maxims are not for Carlo Levi who always finds time to listen, to reflect and to understand.

On the second day of our acquaintance he took me to his home on the top floor of an old *palazzo*; down below Rome seemed to throb with hectic life. I told him I was supposed to speak at a meeting in the Adriano Theatre and that I did not know what to say. 'Of course you do,' Carlo said. 'But let me give you a piece of advice – speak in Italian.' This made me laugh: 'That would be as difficult for me as for you to make a speech in Russian'. He suggested translating my speech into Italian which I could then read out. I decided to take the risk: in the far past I had been able to speak a little Italian, but then I forgot it and could barely understand it now. We went out and strolled about the ancient parts of Rome. 'I know a man who lives round here,' said

Carlo. 'He used to be a fascist but he's not a bad chap on the whole and he's got a typewriter; I could type the thing out for you. You dictate it in French and I'll translate.'

Carlo Levi had been right. When on the next evening I began my speech in Italian, success was assured: I could have uttered the worst platitudes; the fact that a Russian was making a public speech in Italian was something so unheard-of that even anti-Soviet newspapers gave it space.

I met one of the finest novelists in all Europe, Alberto Moravia. A long time ago, in 1933, I reviewed his novel *The Indifferent Ones*, the story of a middle-class family during the years of fascism, a tale of indifference, callousness and boredom. Moravia is a difficult writer, not in form but in content; he is probably most difficult to himself. He lives in a Chekhovian world without Chekhov's tolerance, without pity, and, to crown all, he claims Boccaccio as his master.

Moravia does not concern himself much with plot; he shows his characters as he might display a collection of insects, and not the bright butterflies of the Renaissance either, but savage, morose black-beetles. His *Roman Stories* remind me in some ways of a film – *La Dolce Vita* – that fascinated me, perhaps because the author does not connive with his characters. I can understand Fellini's attitude to the bored rich idlers of Rome. It is more difficult to grasp Moravia's attitude towards his unfortunate characters.

Early in 1963 Picasso showed me cruel drawings illustrating the ugliness and tedium of highly-placed personages. Two days later he came over to Nice. We had lunch together and at 5 o'clock the fancy took him to go to the tearooms where ladies have afternoon tea in what is thought to be the English manner. He sat for a long time gazing at the over-dressed old women smothered in diamonds but whose faces, despite elaborate make-up, were empty, and finally he said: 'I love to draw old men and women; age shows up everything more clearly. Young people's features are still undefined. You know, there's the old age of the poor, which I revere, and there's the old age of bored parasites, and that makes me laugh.'

Moravia's face often expresses boredom and he replies automatically to things one says: 'Yes, I know, I know'. But sometimes his face will light up with what I should call suppressed tenderness, and in just the same way human emotions sometimes break through in his work, and they dazzle one like a sunlit clearing in a dark wood.

When the meetings were over, the Italians told me that I really ought to visit the small town of Albano, a little way outside Rome. I call it a town from its outward appearance, but most of its inhabitants are wine-growers. In Rome I often drank pale fragrant wines from the surrounding hills – Frascati, Albano, Genzano. (There are wines that, like some people, do not travel well, and the wines from the environs of Rome lose their bouquet and their taste when exported abroad, or even to the north of Italy.) A meeting was held in the village theatre that looked like a barn. The wide doors were thrown open and some of the people stood in the street outside. Afterwards I was taken to the Civic Palace and regaled with wine and cordial speeches.

Late that night I was driving back to Rome with one of the embassy secretaries in a large car that seemed particularly clumsy nosing its way through the narrow streets. Two *Unità* reporters drove in our wake in a small Fiat. I had had nothing to eat since the morning and I asked my Soviet comrade whether he knew of some small restaurant in the neighbourhood. He was quite at a loss: 'At your hotel, perhaps? I've never been to any restaurant here'. 'Oh, have you only just come to Rome?' 'No, I've been here a year, but we have all our meals in the canteen.' We stopped and I asked the Italian journalists where we could get supper. They said that they knew of a small *trattoria* in this street where they had dined several times: the proprietor was a comrade.

The *trattoria* was crowded; the customers seemed to be working class. 'Give us something to eat,' one of the journalists said to the proprietor, and added: 'These are Russian comrades'. The proprietor brought us a jug of wine, tomatoes, sausages and pickled artichokes, and then went off into the kitchen to perform mystic rites over the *pasta*. He would have liked to talk to the Russian comrades but he could entrust no one else with preparing the rich sauce that accompanied the fine, thread-like spaghetti. We each ate a large bowl of it. Then roast lamb appeared on the table. The embassy driver, who until then had not uttered a single word, suddenly broke out in admiration: 'So that's how they eat!' and grinned from ear to ear. We made short work of the lamb too. The proprietor was constantly being called away by one customer or another, but at last he sat down at our table, opened the morning paper and said to me: 'I recognized you at once, but I didn't say anything in case it embarrassed you. As a matter of fact, all the others recognized you too'. He asked me to write my name under the photograph in the paper, then turned to the other customers:

'Let's drink to the writer, to the Soviet people – the wine's on the house'. People came up to us and clinked glasses. Some talked of a partisan group to which they had belonged, others about a meeting in the Piazza San-Giovanni, or about their daughters, and it was all very simple and heart-warming. When we left the restaurant at midnight the embassy secretary said: 'I believe I've learnt more about the Italians in these last three hours than in a year'. And the driver, still grinning happily, shook my hand: 'So that's what they're like!'

Two days later a *Unità* reporter drove me to Frascati, a wine-producing place not far from Albano, where I was invited to join the leaders of the Communist Party being entertained for lunch. We ate in a wooden outhouse generally used for village weddings. Some of the Italian comrades I already knew from Moscow, Paris or Spain; others I was meeting for the first time. I was impressed by their unpretentiousness, their interest in art and their conversation which made me forget at moments that they were neither writers nor painters but members of the Politburo of a great Party. Togliatti told me that one of our Soviet film experts disapproved of *Bicycle Thieves* – a film I admired immensely – because, he had said, it 'had no ending'. Togliatti added with a laugh: 'But if you show an unfenced bridge and a man falling into the water and then allow the drowning victim to discourse on the need for railings, nobody would believe the orator was drowning, nor even that he ever fell into the river. It's excellent that the film should end in a human way and not with a sermon'. Listening to Togliatti made me realize how close he and the other comrades were to the Italian people, how at one with its character and culture. We left the table and went out into the small garden where peasants and their wives and children were awaiting Togliatti. A peasant woman led her brood of five up to him: 'Say a word to mine'. Togliatti was as easy and as natural with them as he was with me. In subsequent years I talked several times to Pajetta and Alicata, and often met Donini; in the peace movement I worked with the late Negarville, a man of great integrity and sensibility. All these men were vigorously alive and neither thought on rigid lines nor made set speeches.

Since I have described my meeting with the Italian comrades, I should like to add that other Italians, whose outlook and way of thinking were infinitely remote from mine, were friendly and spontaneous in their talks with me. I recall the way I was received at the Palazzo Vecchio by La Pira, the mayor of Florence and a pious Catholic. It

was exactly as if we had been old acquaintances. He invited me to Fiesole where in a *trattoria* I met journalists on a left-wing Catholic paper; they asked me about the Soviet Union and in their turn talked to me about the Tuscan peasants; our friendly arguments were more like self-questionings than cut and thrust.

I was lucky enough to visit Italy several times after 1949: for a meeting of the World Peace Council bureau, for the assembly of the Society of World Culture, on an invitation to give a series of lectures in various towns, and for a 'Round Table' meeting. It is true that my visits were brief, and days had to be spent in halls reeking of tobacco-smoke, but each time I discovered something for myself and felt my closeness to Italy more keenly. I went to my beloved Florence again, to Venice where in the narrow streets cats tranquilly devour fish-offal, calm in the knowledge that no roaring car will disturb them, and also to delightful Lucca set in its ring of ancient fortress walls, where every house is a museum, but a museum inhabited by people of our time, full of life and passion.

My first acquaintance with Italy goes back half a century, since when there have naturally been great changes. Huge factories have sprung up in the north and modern housing estates for the workers; the picture gallery in Turin is, I believe, unequalled in Europe for its lighting and the display of its pictures. The standard of living has improved. The size of book editions has increased – the workers have begun to read and so, too, have the peasants. The world has expanded: Italy's former provincialism has disappeared. She has overtaken other countries in Western Europe in her knowledge of Soviet literature, and the many translations are not haphazard but carefully selected. Along the roads, where on my walks in the past I used to meet oxen and donkeys, there are streams of little Fiats and motor scooters. But the character of the people, which had impressed and captivated me when I was a very young man, has not changed.

Some writers, such as Vittorini, Quasimodo and Pavese I met personally; others, like Pratolini and Calvino, I know only from their work. It is hard to rate modern Italian literature, and in any case this book does not set out to give ratings. But one thing I can say is that it is a humane literature. An expert in cybernetics once told me that 'in twenty or thirty years' time thinking-machines will iron out the mistakes in books written by human beings'. I fully accept that in the near future machines will replace not only hack-writers but also popu-

larizers and minor scribblers. Yet man will be compelled to correct the work of the most perfect machine because what the machine will have rejected as a 'mistake' may prove to be treasure-trove, a discovery, the inception of creative achievement.

I am vexed to think that it is only towards the end of my life that I first saw the pictures of that remarkable artist, Morandi, in the Milan collection. They are mostly still-lives – bottles, painted in three or four subdued colours; for all their intellectual depth they are neither cerebral nor arid; they make a direct appeal to the emotions. Morandi never lived in Paris, nor apparently ever went there, which perhaps explains why his work is hardly known outside Italy. I had never met him, although we were the same age, for he lived in seclusion in Bologna – and painted bottles. In the summer of 1964 I was in Florence for a 'Round Table' meeting and intended to go on to Bologna afterwards to meet Morandi. But Morandi was no more; he had died a month earlier.

Italian films have revolutionized world cinema. I met several directors: de Sica, Fellini, Visconti, de Santis, Antonioni. One can easily imagine them as characters in their own films. It is said that Neo-Realism owes its triumph to its faithful portrayal of life, its rejection of artificiality in acting and the terseness and unexpectedness of its dialogue. All this is true, but there is more to it than that: these Italian films are utterly sincere, and sincerity is not considered compulsory even for quite honest and gifted artists.

It is surprising how quickly my new Italian friends became part of my life. I think first and foremost of Carlo Levi and Renato Guttuso. I was already sixty when I first met them: an age when one only too often loses old friends and is reluctant to make new ones. We seldom meet – sometimes for a few days in a year or even for one day in several years – but we always talk about the things that we hold close and dear in common. Although they live far away and lead a very different life from mine, besides being of another generation – Carlo is much younger than I and Renato could be my son – I understand them and they understand me; it gives me the feeling that we are circling the earth in the same orbit.

During my last visit to Italy I found myself in the small town of Rocca di Papa above Rome. The bus, after climbing the hill, stopped in the piazza. From there one had to walk further uphill. There were narrow streets, washing hung on lines across them, and children.

We went up slowly, now and again looking down at the vineyards and the valleys, with the dove-coloured emptiness of the sea in the far distance. The steeply pitched streets hummed with life; women gossiped as they shredded French beans. A priest went by, his soutane flapping in the wind. On a house that looked like some ancient fort there was a wooden signboard: Local Committee of the Italian Communist Party. On another similar house hung the picture of a lyre: this was the School of Music. At last we came to a tiny open square with a view over a broad valley. Many thoughts, both important and trivial, ran through my mind. If this had been twenty years ago I should have run up here all the way; now my heart was thumping. The grapes were plentiful this year. Strange that I had never been here before. And why had I never been to Mexico or Siam? Elephants have extraordinary eyes. And here there were small donkeys, just like those in Spain. It would be nice to stay, if only a week, in this little town. A week was, after all, quite a lot of time for a man over seventy. Strange – it was a time for dying, yet I did not think about it; my heart was full of other things. A week was an eternity if one had peace. At the back of these fragmented thoughts – or, more precisely, fragmented pictures – I felt a deep sense of peace, of happiness; I was truly relaxed, even though Fadeyev claimed that this was something I was incapable of being. Suddenly, looking round, I caught sight of the clock: in fifteen minutes' time the last bus would be leaving, I should have to run for it. I grumbled to myself: I've only just crawled up here and now I have to go down again. Things of that sort happened too often. Like an incantation I bade the old deaf houses, the small donkey, the shop-signs *au revoir*, or more briefly, as the Italians say, *ciao*.

But let me return to November 1949. I was due to leave for Sicily. The Italians had invited us to stay another week and I had chosen to go to Sicily where I had never been before, and this, according to Guttuso, meant that I had not seen Italy at all. Towards evening I went back to the hotel to rest and found a note: 'We are leaving by air for Moscow tomorrow according to instructions. Joliot is coming with us, we must get back in time for the celebrations. I hope you enjoy your last evening. A. Fadeyev'. I did not go to my room but went out to wander about the city, making my way to the Piazza Navona. A cold wind had risen, there were fewer people about than usual, and the long piazza, flooded with the light of old-fashioned lanterns, looked like a ballroom after the guests have left. I watched the fountain jet: it

rose and came splashing down as it had done yesterday, and for centuries.

At the Alcron Hotel in Prague the telephone rang at 5 a.m. I had barely time to shave. Fadeyev said we were leaving by special plane and in Legnica, in an hour's time, we should get some tea. A Czech woman at the airport kept telling us: 'You won't take off, the fog's so thick one can't even see the aircraft'. Fadeyev insisted: 'We must leave, we've got to be in Moscow today'.

On the plane I took the seat next to Joliot who had said he wanted to talk to me. He started by saying: 'It wasn't easy with the Yugoslavs, some members of the committee objected . . .' I suddenly fell asleep. What woke me up was Joliot seizing my hand and saying: 'Look!' Through the small window I saw clumps of trees bearing their last few leaves; they were not down below but above us. The plane veered sharply: 'We're going back to Prague, it's the fog'.

At the airport in Prague we went to the restaurant. At the next table people were drinking beer and eating sausages. Fadeyev tried to telephone the Peace Committee but there was no reply, it was too early, not yet 9 o'clock. I told him that we had better order breakfast. This made him angry: 'We've got no Czech money. Don't you understand?' Joliot-Curie whispered to me: 'Couldn't one get a cup of coffee? I'm not feeling too well'. I immediately ordered coffee for all of us, bread, butter and ham, this last for Fadeyev who began to protest: 'You're mad. What if we can't get the Czechs on the telephone?' I waved my hand signifying complete indifference. Joliot-Curie drank two cups of coffee, ate a roll and suddenly said: 'Do you ever think about death?'

The Czechs turned up. We sat about at the airport for quite a long while but nevertheless reached Moscow in time.

20

'I SELDOM think about death, but when I do, I think about it steadily and without dodging the issue,' Joliot-Curie said while we were at Prague airport. 'The thought that he will cease to exist is unacceptable to a man. It's not physical fear, but something deeper, the rejection of non-existence, of a void. The idea of a life beyond the grave must have arisen from this feeling, and so long as science was in its infancy people comforted themselves with that sort of illusory hope. But knowledge exacts fortitude. The absence of life after death doesn't mean a negation of continuity. In the first place there's the physical continuity between the generations decreed by nature. And then there's work, creativity, love – the things that remain after the man himself, his name and even his bones have vanished.'

I took down these words at the time but Joliot-Curie expressed this idea far better eight years later in his essay *La Valeur Humaine de la Science*: 'What fearful disillusionment I have witnessed,' he wrote, 'in those who suddenly lost their faith. But why – I almost said: why the devil – did they conceive of an after-life in another world?'

'My own thoughts about death led me, very early, to a strictly human and earthly problem. Is not eternity the perceptible and living chain connecting us to all things made and all beings who lived on this earth ...

'Every being who passes through the world leaves an indelible trace, be it only a piece of wood worn away by a hand on the banister, or a bit of stone hollowed out on the tread of a stair. I love wood polished by use, steps worn by men's feet; I love my old pewter candlestick ... In them lies eternity.'

(Although I have begun my reminiscences of Joliot-Curie with a conversation about death I do not think I have ever met anyone more affirmatively alive. It is now five years since he died but I still find it difficult to grasp that he is no more and often catch myself thinking: a pity Joliot hasn't turned up, he would have known what to do.)

Our talk at the airport had a sequel. In 1955 he returned to the subject. An enlarged meeting of the bureau of the World Council of

Peace was being held in Vienna. In his speech Joliot made the point that the stockpiles of atomic weapons were enough to wipe out all life on our planet. Some thought this opinion too sweeping. ('A specialist's arguments; politically a mistake.') I arrived in Paris from Vienna a fortnight after Joliot, having had to wait for my visa. I was immediately approached by his secretary, Roger Mayer: 'Joliot says he'll have to resign from the presidency, he can't go back on his convictions as a scientist'. The incident was quickly settled and Joliot calmed down, but as soon as we met he said: 'You see, it's a matter of conscience. Politics is a high human function. But if in spite of commonsense, in spite of the Soviet proposals and in spite of all we're doing, the catastrophe were to occur, believe me, there would be no one left to argue about the political meaninglessness of what had happened. When I was receiving the Nobel Prize in Stockholm it was all very festive, but I upset the general complacency a bit, for although I didn't yet realize the power of atomic energy and, of course, could not foresee Hiroshima, I ended my speech with a warning: take care! The forces released by man are gigantic. I recalled the novae which flare up and die out, though this was more of an image than a scientific hypothesis. The death of man is terrible but what he creates doesn't become extinct. I'm certain that for all the zigzags of history, the failures, the stupidities – which should be seen as part of mankind's infancy, for it's only six thousand years since man began to think – yes, for all the stupidities, there's progress, there's a forward movement. Believers thought that intelligent beings existed only on the Earth. Hardly . . . But if in spite of everything an atomic catastrophe were to take place, what would be left? A "nova"? A void? One generation hands on the torch to the next, it's your own words I'm quoting. But to whom should we then hand down what's been created in the course of six thousand years? A vacuum . . . You yourself said I was an optimist. But I say: take care! Illusions are the greatest danger. A man who's just got married and found a new flat can't possibly envisage that before he's had time to arrange the furniture everything will be turned into dust. It's not the fault of science but of the uneven development of mankind. Some of the people who, unfortunately, wield tremendous power lack moral brakes and elementary knowledge: they think that the release of atomic energy is just another invention like the steam-engine or the internal combustion engine'.

One cannot separate the life of Joliot-Curie from the problems which

have confronted us since the advent of the new physics. I witnessed the dawn of that era in the evening of my life. Of course Einstein's discoveries had already impressed me deeply in the early twenties, although I did not understand them properly. The magnitude of the cataclysm of Hiroshima stunned me, but I did not fully grasp what had happened. The atom bomb appalled me because it was a thousand or ten thousand times more powerful than an ordinary bomb. I did not realize that the tragedy lay in the fact that the growth of knowledge had overtaken that of morals. Power in America was not in the hands of the professor of Princeton University, looked upon as a cranky genius with a mane of white hair and a nineteenth century love of humanity, but in those of a respectable-looking modern man, a commonplace politician who had been accidentally hoisted into the presidential chair.

I had listened reverently to Einstein but had spent only a few hours with him; Joliot, however, I met very often over a period of eight years. I not only loved him, I am deeply grateful to him for helping me to understand what until then had been a closed book to me. Over his coffin his friend Bernal said: 'Joliot's tragedy was the tragedy of a noble nature'. That night he added: 'It's also the tragedy of science'.

People sometimes say of a writer that he is like his own books. It may be that Joliot-Curie was like his works – I am too ignorant of modern physics to be able to judge. But in his manners, his conversation, his enthusiasms, in short, in his whole being Joliot was not in the least like the idea of a scientist I had held since childhood. He was anything but a narrow specialist, an ascetic or an absentminded academic. In any case, all the talk about 'born' scholars, writers, engineers, musicians and so forth is false and arbitrary. Joliot himself once said to me: 'I don't know myself why I took up science. In my schooldays my ambition was to become a professional footballer, and a brilliant future was foretold me. Things turned out differently, and I was drawn to science. I hesitated between chemistry and physics. Evidently there was more to it than pure chance. I'm not sure that I should have had enough persistence and patience for chemistry. At my age men have not only left their personal mark on their work, their own traits have been shaped by what they do. But I'm still surprised at having become a scientist. The truth is, I feel more at home with the fishermen of Arcouest than at scientific gatherings'.

It is quite possible that Joliot was not a born scientist, but he became

one all the same and brought to science his gifts, his creative initiative and his energy. He experienced the joy of discovery, when, as he said, he felt like dancing, shouting and clapping his hands; he also lived to see the reckoning. And by this I do not mean the many injustices which his civic courage drew upon him, though I must refer to these. Joliot created the atomic reactor *Zoe* which was the pride of France. A year later the head of the French government dismissed him from his post of High Commissioner for Atomic Energy: the politicians could not forgive the great scientist for being a Communist. (I should like to relate an episode which I find more ludicrous than tragic. When, in 1935, the King of Sweden presented Joliot-Curie with the Nobel Prize all the Stockholm newspapers wrote about the young French scientist and his Swedish colleagues were loud in their praises. But in March 1950, when Joliot came to Stockholm for a peace committee meeting, the press ignored him. The day after he arrived I met him carrying his bag: he had been asked to leave the hotel as they did not wish to house a Red.) When I speak of 'the reckoning' I am not referring to administrative persecutions: these were not connected with the discovery of artificial radio-activity but with Joliot's political role. What affected him profoundly was something altogether different. He often said: 'Ordinary people are beginning to hate science'. He was well aware of his responsibility, and both in public and in private said that atomic energy could bring people the greatest happiness by freeing them from compulsory labour but could also destroy the human race. In the laboratory he felt he was completely in control. But as well as scientific discoveries there is their exploitation, and it was the politicians, not the scientists, who decided to utilize the discoveries of Einstein, Rutherford, Joliot-Curie, Niels Bohr, Fermi and Hahn to produce weapons of mass destruction. 'Confidence in science has been shaken,' Joliot said to me at one of our last meetings. 'Ordinary people see only the evil of it: strontium 90, the effects of radiation, the prospect of universal annihilation.'

I may be accused of exaggerating the role of the individual, but since I am writing my personal memoirs and not an historical treatise I must admit that, in my view, the peace movement is inseparable from Joliot's personal qualities, his awareness of responsibility as an atomic physicist, his ability to bring together people of different points of view. He often used to say of someone or other 'he's not an enemy, just an opponent': he regarded only those who wanted war as enemies, and as

opponents those who did not wish to join the movement because they thought it was pro-Communist, but who were defending peace in their own way.

In the early fifties the political climate was severe: it was the time of the Korean War, mutual hatred had reached its apogee. But even in those years I remember how Joliot defended the Italian Catholic Signora Piaggio who spoke about the responsibility of both sides, the Danish lady Elin Appel who opposed the attacks on western policy, and the American Congregationalist minister John Darr, saying that 'one can and should argue with them, but not here, not inside the peace movement'.

Of course, had Joliot never existed our movement would still have come into being, but I think it would have been narrower and more arid. Everything is politics – both war and the struggle against it – but those for whom politics is a profession could not, even inside the movement, rid themselves of their habits, their vocabulary, their formulas (which is why Joliot particularly valued the participation of Yves Farge who had nothing of the professional politician about him).

The peace movement took up a great deal of Joliot's time. He once confessed to me: 'There are moments when I have doubts ... My family say I can't go on like this. And, indeed, why should I act as the peacemaker between the Dutch and the Indonesian delegates? Why should they come to me with tales about squabbles in the secretariat? Why am I asked to reassure the Honduras delegate that next time he'll be able to speak during the day session and not at night? All this could be done by other people. I want time for my scientific work. But I also realize that one can't draw a line – I'll do this and others'll do that – the more so since everybody's got into the habit of bringing me their problems. They might say: "It means that the movement has now been given second place". On the other hand, those who take me to task are right: my proper place *is* the laboratory, not the committee-room, arguing all night about whether it should be "demand" or "suggest". That's the place for people like Laurent Casanova, Sereni, Nenni. But I want our movement to spread; it's only then that we'll be able to influence the policy of the west. So it follows that I ought to stay on the committee'.

The political problems of the fifties are still of actual moment to us: the people who worked with Joliot-Curie are still alive, and there are many things about which I cannot speak. There were difficulties, all-

night vigils, political dissensions, also at times personal antagonisms, but Joliot always succeeded in conciliating people and putting new heart into them. On one occasion he said to me: 'X accuses me of exaggerated optimism. You have only to think about history to be an optimist. But there are also Communist comrades who express surprise at my optimism, so I expect it's a matter of my natural disposition; not so much a question of philosophy as of physiology'. I know that occasionally Joliot had a very hard time of it for weeks on end, but he was able to keep up his own as well as other people's spirits.

There was nothing of the bookish scholar about his appearance; he looked more like a sporting type; he loved skiing and was a passionate angler. The stuffed heads of the gigantic pike he had caught hung on the walls of his house in Antony. 18th March 1950 was his fiftieth birthday; it occurred during one of the permanent committee's sessions. His Swedish friends remembered the date and gave him a present at the meeting. We were sitting next to each other at the time. Joliot said at once: 'It's a spinning-rod'. Childlike pleasure and curiosity were written on his face. He did not like to open the parcel in the presence of all the others but bent down, tore a little of the wrapping paper and whispered delightedly: 'It's made of some special kind of bamboo'.

In the summer of 1951 Joliot was having a holiday near Moscow. One day he came to see me in New Jerusalem¹. He was in excellent spirits; he joked and said at lunch that he had acquired an enemy in the Soviet Union: some kind of herb which was sprinkled over everything: soup, potatoes and meat (the enemy turned out to be dill). Then he asked whether we had a samovar. We happened to have one which three years before had been given to me at a Tula factory. We had never used it. We began to light kindling but it burnt without the charcoal catching, or else went out at once. Joliot blew into the chimney with all his might until at long last we got the samovar going. Joliot admired the old willows, carefully examined the bird-box for starlings and said as he was leaving: 'To think that we haven't once mentioned the bureau, the secretariat or Rogge! That's what I call a real day of peace'.

A week later we set off to attend a bureau meeting in Helsinki. On the train a state coach had been put at Joliot's disposal. Irène, his wife,

¹ The village where Ehrenburg has his country cottage, see p. 237 *et seq.*

accompanied him. In Leningrad he had asked me to take him to the Hermitage: 'I was told that that's where they keep some of the pictures I saw fifteen years ago in the Moscow Museum of Western Art'. At that time the Impressionists – to say nothing of Matisse and Picasso – were regarded as unsuitable for showing to the public and the extremely precious collection was stored: the pictures hung on screens. Joliot was entranced, he particularly admired landscapes by Sisley, Monet and Pissarro. 'I feel as if I'd spent a whole summer in the country,' he said to me as we were leaving, and added in a low voice leaning towards me: 'It's not kind to deprive the Soviet people of such joy', but went on at once: 'It's not for long though, I'm absolutely certain of that'.

In 1955 Joliot fell seriously ill and was taken to the Saint-Antoine hospital in Paris (where three years later he died). It is a very gloomy old building. Joliot was in a small private ward. He told me that the doctors were uncertain of their diagnosis, but that he observed himself, took notes and had made friends with the head physician. Later he naturally referred to the easing of international tension – this was the right time, he said, to try to broaden the peace movement. He suddenly picked up a canvas that stood with its face to the wall and said with some embarrassment: 'I'm condemned to idleness here, so I've begun to paint. Don't judge it too severely, I've never learnt painting, I'm starting from scratch'. He had painted the view from his window, the courtyard, a few trees, the wall of a house. I looked at two or three more pictures. 'Do you think it's very bad?' he asked. I replied that there was a feeling of light in his landscapes, a natural simplicity, even naivety, but the drawing was firm enough.

'A fifty-four-year-old child's playthings,' he said.

In the spring of 1956 Irène Joliot-Curie died of leukaemia. It was a terrible blow for Joliot; they had lived and worked together for thirty years. In 1926 the young man who was working at the Institut du Radium as Marie Curie's personal assistant married her daughter, who was also an assistant there. It was a happy marriage although they were very unlike each other. Irène was reserved and rather taciturn and Joliot, who was generally talkative, often fell silent in her presence. I remember the night we spent in the state coach. Irène soon retired to the sleeping compartment, but Joliot stayed on. He began to talk about loneliness, about his 'earthy nature', saying that at times a man wants to break out of his life: 'We're all like car tyres spinning in a rut'. In 1956 Joliot went to Vienna. We met him at the station. That night he

said to me: 'Irène died from what we call our occupational disease. We're more careful nowadays but in the thirties . . .' He paused and then murmured: 'I'm not finding this easy'. A year later I visited him in Antony. He showed me round the garden: a glorious wall covered with climbing roses, the last tulips. 'Irène had the knack of massing the colours of tulips. They flowered this spring but she was no longer here to see them.' Some minutes later he said: 'I'm gripped by the feeling that I must hurry. I want to get things done. It's not that I'm over-anxious about my health but one shouldn't take it too casually'.

Earlier in 1956 he once started to talk about Stalin: 'After the 20th Party Congress a lot of our intellectuals wavered, but I believe that our cause has made a step forward. I never deluded myself as some others did who talked about Stalin as if he were a demi-god. I remember telling X: "Take care. We mustn't believe in infallibility, we can leave that to the Catholics". I saw many faults in the Soviet Union, but the people there were the first to make a start—it's not surprising'.

In the spring of 1956 when I had come on his invitation to Antony, he said: 'Please talk about the good things going on in your country in front of the children. But at the moment let's talk about the past. Do you understand it? I've thought a lot about it but I haven't got to the bottom of it'.

He joined the Communist Party at a terrible time, in 1942, and faithfully followed to the end the road he had chosen. His choice had been not only emotionally determined — by the heroism of the Communists in the Resistance and the Soviet people's fight against fascism — but also by a scientist's logic and reasoning. Recalling Fadeyev, Joliot said: 'We once had an argument — you remember, it was in Vienna — he tried to persuade me to take back my words about an atomic war being able to annihilate life on our planet, and he kept saying: "we know you're a loyal friend". I replied that loyalty was a good thing in friendship but in politics, as in science, to have faith is not enough, one must also think'.

Joliot had fine, clear-cut features; he looked typically French and had many national traits: his enjoyment of things was occasionally tinged with melancholy, he talked a lot but seldom gave anything away, and his mind was precise and logical.

At Antony, looking at him as he romped with his grandchildren, the children of his daughter Hélène, I was reminded of Victor Hugo's *L'Art d'être Grandpère*. There were many beautiful things in the house,

good wines at lunch, photographs of friends in the study; there was clarity, light and happiness in everything. I did not know that I was seeing Joliot for the last time.

I travelled to his funeral by air with D. V. Skobeltsyn, who in the thirties had worked in Joliot's laboratory: we had known two different men but the one we loved was the same.

After long discussion between Joliot's children and the representatives of the government, the funeral was separated into two ceremonies. On my return to Moscow I wrote: 'A catafalque was erected in the courtyard of the ancient Sorbonne, in front of the seventeenth century chapel, between the memorials to Victor Hugo and Pasteur. Men of the Garde Républicaine in their archaic helmets with horses' tails stood like statues. There, too, stood Ministers and Ambassadors, Academicians and Senators. There stood the members of the governing body of the Sorbonne in their red robes edged with ermine . . . Then the Ministers left, the guards marched away. In the Paris suburb of Sceaux, near the cemetery, Joliot's friends and comrades – members of the peace movement, students who had attended his lectures, workers, clerks, housewives, laboratory assistants, ordinary French men and women – had gathered. It was a stormy day, the people walked under heavy rain, many were in tears; beside the cumbrous official wreaths lay modest flowers from the little back gardens of France'.

In the evening several members of the World Peace Council who had come for the funeral met to discuss what was to be done now. I remember Bernal, Casanova, Spano and Isabelle Blume. We could not speak, our grief was too fresh. I could see Joliot as if he were present and could not grasp the fact that he was no more. And even now, five years later, I still see him alive, and everything in me rebels against the idea that he is dead. He had said that every human being leaves a trace on this earth, but it is difficult to call his memory a trace, rather it is a wound and a landmark.

21

THE PEACE movement organized congresses and meetings which drew great crowds. In Rome two hundred thousand people marched through the streets with lighted torches. We were given a solemn reception by the President of Poland, Bierut; and in Delhi Nehru, addressing us, spoke of India's traditional feeling for peace. We made pilgrimages to Gandhi's grave and to lay wreaths at the caves where the Gestapo had shot Italian patriots. At the Warsaw Congress we were shown the bloodstained shirt of the Paraguayan student Alonzo who had been tortured to death by the police for speaking out in defence of peace. A delegate from Brazil died of heart failure on arrival in Vienna because the long flight had been too much for him. At one of the congresses we listened to a recital of Nazim Hikmet's poems, at another Paul Robeson sang. At a third an old Indian story-teller chanted a poem extolling brotherhood. We heard eloquent speeches from experienced parliamentarians – Pierre Cot and Nenni – we listened to Sartre's sparkling disquisitions and to the prayers of Buddhist monks. There were some stormy occasions. At a meeting of the bureau in Helsinki in December 1956 we began work at nine one morning and only reached agreement at eight the next day, after twenty-three hours of arguing in a stuffy smoke-filled room. Five years later, in the same place, we discussed the convening of a congress on disarmament. This greatly angered the Chinese delegates, and the Swedish Cooperatives' hall, the scene of stolid reports on the years' turnover, became a battlefield.

Looking back, I recall with special emotion the Stockholm meeting in March 1950. We met in the basement of a restaurant (we called it 'the catacombs'). The Swedish papers made no mention of the meeting: the Stockholm citizens were not interested in us. Nor do I remember the speeches. But the launching of the Stockholm Appeal was an outstanding event in our movement. We realized that we were appealing to millions of people and that a great deal depended on the success or failure of this appeal; when Joliot-Curie read out the text (probably the shortest we had ever adopted) the Soviet delegation was deeply moved and we were the first to sign it.

Some months before the Stockholm meeting, the Soviet government had declared that it was compelled to equip itself with atomic weapons. The western press claimed that in this respect the Soviet Union would never catch up with America. The Third World War was spoken of as imminent. A French newspaper ran a poll: 'What will you do if the Russians capture Paris?' The western press called the Stockholm Appeal 'a Trojan horse'. Journalists asked me whether we wanted to outlaw the atom bomb because it hampered Moscow's aggressive plans. In their alarm ordinary citizens saw Soviet tanks already rolling along the Champs Elysées and Piccadilly. When the American radio broadcast a play featuring an imaginary attack, a panic broke out. An American told us that in San Francisco a small girl whose elder brother was describing how atom bombs would annihilate the Reds, asked: 'Can't we go to somewhere where there's no sky?' Adults looked at it differently: to them the bomb spelt defence, salvation.

A Danish journalist, a nineteenth-century Radical, Kirkeby, whom I had first met as long ago as the twenties, told me that he had hesitated about signing the Stockholm Appeal: he hated war but thought that the banning of atomic weapons would be a one-sided advantage. 'I asked my wife: "Don't you think the appeal leans too much to one side?" and she replied: "Possibly, but the atom bomb's leaning over our children". And she signed.' I am sure millions of men and women signed out of the same kind of feeling.

Then a miracle happened: the appeal which we had worked out in the basement room of that Stockholm restaurant circled the whole world. Six months later, in Warsaw, I met women from France, Italy, Argentina and Greece who had gone from house to house knocking at all doors. I remember Signora Firmina, an Italian woman, who worked at a printer's; she had collected eighteen thousand signatures and told me that she had won over Catholics – even nuns, women who feared the Communists like the devil. The Brazilians brought boxes filled with scraps of paper on which illiterate peasants had signed with crosses. Representatives of Black Africa showed us sticks with notches in lieu of signatures.

Many years later one of America's military commentators admitted that the five hundred million signatures to the Stockholm Appeal had made Truman hesitate when the question of using the atom bomb was raised during the Korean War. In the spring of 1950 we could not of

course foresee this, but we left the 'catacombs' filled with hope.

The text of the Appeal was approved on 19th March. On the same evening I was invited to dinner by the left-wing Social-Democrat Senator Branting. Everything was according to Swedish tradition: hospitable and slightly solemn. The host proposed toasts, and the flames of the slender candles on the table fluttered. Nenni spoke about the Vatican and the North Atlantic pact. Branting's friend, Hjalmar Mehr, argued about the 'Scandinavian alliance'. I ought to have been long accustomed by now to such evening entertainments, yet I was not entirely at my ease.

One of my neighbours at table was a young woman, Liselotte Mehr. We talked in French. Suddenly she said to me in Russian: 'I went to school in Moscow'. It turned out that she had been born in Germany; that when Hitler came to power her parents had moved to Paris in good time, and from there to Moscow where the girl was sent to a ten-year school. Later they went to live in Stockholm where Liselotte met Mehr. I felt happier at once: since she had been to school in Moscow she was not a total stranger.

I remembered Branting vaguely from the Spanish days. In the thirties he had been very much in the news: he had accused Goering at the time of Dimitrov's trial and had organized aid for the Spanish Republicans. Alexandra Kollontay told me that during the war he had opposed his party colleagues who were trying to buy off Hitler with concessions. Although twenty-five years before I had travelled about Sweden quite a lot, I did not know the Swedes well, or rather I had a somewhat abstract notion of them, probably derived from reading Strindberg. I believed that almost every Swede must be a champion of justice, write poems about death and be afraid of life's trivialities. I later grew friendly with Branting and we worked together on organizing the 'Round Table' meetings. The romantic Viking turned out to be a lonely old man, but in one particular at least I had not been mistaken: he did indeed write poems about death. He died in the summer of 1965, and the news stirred up memories of the thirties for a moment.

It was a night as cold as winter. I strolled for a long time about the deserted streets. Instead of pigeons Stockholm has seagulls. They are supposed to fly over the sea but, like pigeons, they prefer staying close to human life; at sea they circle round ships, and in Stockholm they flutter about the quays, shrill and restless. The streetlamps blazed with

a bright cold light. In the well-lit show-windows the display of dinner sets, vacuum-cleaners, shirts and oranges looked stony. An old man was taking a fat dachshund for a walk. Two sailors passed, reeling about and shouting. In the cruel wind of the Baltic a couple of lovers were kissing, pressed to a pillar that was covered with posters. Long, empty streets. Lights in some windows, behind which people hoped, quarrelled, wept and danced. Towards morning, in my small hotel bedroom I wrote: 'The whole thing lies in people'. I cannot recall why it was precisely then that I wrote these words which apply to any day of one's life.

The Swedish authorities were tolerant and hospitable. I often had occasion to go to Stockholm and this city became part of my life. There and in other Swedish towns various congresses, conferences and meetings of the World Peace Council and its bureau were held. I spoke at meetings in Göteborg and Norrköping. The Swedish writers invited me to their club. I gave lectures to students in Uppsala and Lund; I met several Ministers and also scholars like Gustaffson and Myrdal, as well as poets and journalists. Sweden never fails to surprise the foreigner. It is a country favoured by fortune: two world wars have spared it. From being an idyllic agricultural outpost of Europe it has become a country of advanced industry and ultra-modern comfort. Its contemporary architecture recalls the dreams of our Constructivists in the early twenties. Everything is sensible: the large windows, the arm-chairs, the yachts, the kitchens. And yet, for all that, the works of Swedish authors, and the arguments of any Swede after he has emptied a bottle of vodka, reveal so many contradictions, such devastation of the spirit that one is taken aback. Apparently creature comforts bring enjoyment but also take something away; while they form a pleasant habit, they exasperate beyond measure.

I quite often meet the poet, novelist and essay writer Artur Lundqvist. Our acquaintance began in 1950, at the World Peace Congress. He is the son of a labourer from Skånia. His features have a poetical gentleness, but in matters of principle he is unyielding and his spiritual kinship is not with the mild beeches but with the rugged fjords of his country. He is a great traveller and has covered half the world; in his books there is not the slightest tinge of 'cosiness' – nor is there any in his life. Since early youth he has been fighting against petty minds and social conservatism, and he has spoken – he still speaks – about the triumph of the future; he is an optimist though one much given to



Left: Alexander Fadayev. Right: Nazim Hikmet



Left: Pablo Neruda. Right: Peter Konchalovsky

sadness. I was not surprised to hear over the radio that when the terrible earthquake occurred in Agadir, Lundqvist was there, for I am convinced that the earth always trembles under him, but his legs are long and strong.

I was in Stockholm with Academician D. V. Skobeltsyn when Lundqvist received the Lenin Peace Prize. This coincided with the tense days of a cold war incident: the award of the Nobel Prize to Pasternak by the Swedish Academy a week earlier. The Lundqvist presentation ceremony took place in the same hall where the Nobel Prizes are awarded. A man in evening-dress came on to the platform and announced lugubriously: 'The concert which was to have been part of the programme has had to be cancelled, the quartet has broken up owing to certain events'. (It appeared that one of the members of the famous quartet had refused to play because of what had happened.) At a formal dinner party (by candlelight, naturally) Lundqvist got up and said: 'By and large, writers always have a hard time of it'. He remained standing for a moment and then sat down.

Why is it that there are so many *poètes damnés*, gloomy drunkards and suicides in Sweden? I do not know and I do not want to put forward paradoxical hypotheses to explain it. One thing remains true: 'The whole thing lies in people'. And people are not, apparently, satisfied by artistically served herrings in a paradise of plastics.

In the middle fifties, when there had been a thaw in the world, Liselotte told me about her school years. It was at the time of the *yezhevshchina*. From time to time a bewildered boy or a girl with a tear-stained face would turn up at school. Liselotte fell childishly in love with one of the masters. He disappeared. She had known Moscow during the very difficult years, but in spite of, or perhaps precisely because of this, she had retained her love for the Russian people, for the language and for Moscow.

I should like to interrupt this account of Stockholm with another story. I feel I have to tell it, although it may appear rather melodramatic and even incredible. The name of its hero I shall not give because he might not like to have it made public. On the eve of the Revolution a Russian émigré, a writer, met a young poetess of Russian extraction in Paris. A child was born. The father soon left for Russia, and the poetess married a sculptor, who later became famous. The stepfather grew fond of the boy and was very kind

to him. One day the boy saw the film *The Battleship Potemkin*. He knew his father was in Moscow and decided to go to the Soviet Union. His name was entered on the passport of a Soviet painter and he went to Moscow to live with his father and a young stepmother. His romantic expectations were disappointed. His stepmother sent him to stand in queues. He soon quarrelled with her and ran away to join the *bezprizornyy*. I remember his mother weeping as she showed me a letter from her son which he had written at night in a chemist's shop where he was sheltering from the cold.

In the course of a police raid the boy was caught and sent to a children's home. At school he persuaded two of his fellow pupils to run away to Paris. They had bicycles, and the boy stole a revolver. After an exchange of shots the runaways were arrested on the Turkish border by the Soviet frontier-guards. Our hero's mother went to Romain Rolland for help and then to Gorky who was in Capri. Things were still pretty easy in Russia at that time and her son was sent to Bolshevo, a model colony. In 1934 he came to Moscow and asked me about his mother and stepfather. I talked to him for an hour and realized that his life was not going to be any too smooth. In 1937 his father was arrested. The young man went to the French embassy and demanded to be sent to Paris. He had no documents to prove that he had been born in France. He was arrested that same day and sent to a labour camp. When his time was up and he was freed he went to Moscow and, again, to the French embassy. He was arrested once more and sent to another camp.

I think it was in 1953 that he wrote to me, and I wrote to the prosecutor. As a result he was released. When I next saw him he was no longer a youth but a man with greying hair; he had forgotten his French and had never learnt to speak good Russian, and he had no trade or profession. He stayed first at a professor's and then with an engineer, both of whom had been in the camps with him. Later he was allowed to go to France.

In Paris he came to see me. He was well-dressed and told me that at first, after finding out his unusual history from the embassy, journalists had pestered him, but he had refused to answer their questions. He had found a job and was earning reasonably good money. He lived with his mother. After a short silence he said quietly: 'But life's uninteresting here, I really feel I'd like to go back to the Soviet Union. It's no longer a silly boy's dream but the sober conclusion of a man in his fifties.'

There were real people there'. When I told this story to Liselotte she said: 'I can see what he means'.

But to return to the city with which both the peace movement and much of my life are closely bound up. It is a northern city, cold even in summer and with short days in December. Although I have lived many years in Paris I am a northerner. I know how difficult it is to melt the ice of human relations. In any case, human warmth is particularly prized where people are inclined to be silent and are accustomed to solitude.

'The whole thing lies in people.' In 1950 I had reached my late fifties. Naturally I was stronger then than I am now: I could work for ten hours without a break and walk five miles at a stretch; but I was often troubled in my mind. It seemed to me that I was not so much living as letting my last years slip by, and I ascribed my spiritual inertia to age. I could not stop writing, though at that time writing did not come easy. This does not apply to all writers, only to myself, for my literary work depended on the events of the day, on the newspapers, on some unhappy letter telling me about someone else's distress which I was powerless to alleviate. In 1950 I started writing *The Ninth Wave*; I wrote a lot but without any inner glow. The peace movement was my salvation: here was a good, live cause, espoused by good people. Possibly the success of the Stockholm Appeal was due primarily to individuals. The names of Joliot-Curie and Yves Farge were known to millions. But Signora Firmina, whom few could have known, must have been a great-hearted woman to succeed in persuading thousands of complete strangers to sign the Appeal.

Yes, my ties with Stockholm were many. It was in that city, on a dull winter day, that the idea first came to me of writing my memoirs. I cannot tell how good or how bad they are, for a writer is a poor judge of his own work, but they are genuinely *my* books; I am writing them out of inner necessity, and doing it sincerely, without the old bitterness – which more than once saved me – but also without any forced sweetening. I remember how the idea of writing these memoirs came to me: I was suddenly assailed by the fear of dying without having set down anything about the people I had known and loved. The years of my own life came in later, because it proved impossible to talk about other people without bringing myself in. And once I had made up my mind to get down to this work my thoughts centred not so much on

my own hopes and errors but on the long line of people who had departed but were still close to me, warm and alive.

A superstitious fear made me ask myself whether I should have enough strength and time to complete this task. In a notebook, among entries about committee meetings and rough drafts of resolutions, I found a poem by Tyutchev in which he says that in old age the blood thins but not the emotions.

In January 1963 I went to see Picasso. He took it into his head to admonish me: 'You've reached an age when it isn't at all necessary to stand up for truth on every occasion. Remember the young man in Palestine; it was for this that they pierced his hands with nails'. I smiled: Pablo is ten years older than I, but there is more passion in him, even, I would say, more frenzy, than in any young man I have known, and he does nothing but stand up for truth.

Naturally I know well enough now what old age means: the motor is worn out and often refuses to function. I feel my age but hardly ever give it a thought. It is not a man's age that matters; long before death comes people can die spiritually more than once and be reborn: the fire seems to have burnt itself out, just a bit of charred wood smouldering under the ashes, but a human breath suddenly fans it into flame again. The whole thing lies in people.

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EARLY IN 1950 I submitted a request: I needed to go to France for my work on *The Ninth Wave* to collect information on certain post-war events. Permission was granted, which was a piece of luck, but shortly I learnt that the French refused to give me a visa. A Quai d'Orsay spokesman informed the press that 'M. Ehrenburg has been refused a visa not because he is a Communist but because there are grounds for believing that he is personally inimical to France'.

When I saw this in a French newspaper I was furious, but on second thoughts I found it funny. How often had I not been taken to task for my excessive affection for France. Only a short time before I had read a long article by a critic who went out of his way to prove that in *The Storm* I had idealized even the 'unprincipled bourgeois Lancier'. And here, ironically, was M. Bidault proclaiming that I was an enemy of France.

1950 was a year when the cold war threatened hourly to become a hot one. In the summer the guns began to roar in Korea. It is true that Stalin had turned his attention to the problems of linguistics, but ordinary citizens started laying in stores of salt and soap. As an old man said to me: 'You can't live without salt. And if you've got to die, you ought to meet your death in a clean shirt'. During that spring and summer I travelled to Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany and England and wherever I went I came across blind prejudice, hatred and fear. The events of those days are still fresh in everybody's mind and my reason for recording some trivial incidents that happened then is merely to remind people of the strange climate that prevailed in the late forties and early fifties.

It is hard to understand why I became the pet target of anti-Soviet journalists. They may have had an exaggerated idea of my importance, or perhaps it was my familiarity with Western life that particularly galled them, but the fact remains that they wrote about me often and with extraordinary venom. In Stockholm a French delegate gave me a copy of the little paper *Rouge et Noir* which informed its readers that I had recently been elected to the Supreme Soviet at a salary of ten

thousand roubles a month and that I was moving into 'a house in the luxury suburb of Moscow, what is called the "forbidden zone", where the most important officials reside.' The article went on to ask about 'disappeared persons': 'Gone is Tamara Motyleva whom only a year ago official reviewers extolled to the skies. She has lost everything, even her university chair, for having quoted Léon Blum. Gone is Anatoly Sofronov on whom the Kremlin's lightning fell because he had dared to expose careerism. Gone is the most outstanding Soviet novelist Mikhail Sholokhov who has taken refuge in a hamlet on the Volga'.

The leader of the French left-wing writers at the time was Martin-Chauffier. He sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Bidault, whom he had known in the Resistance years, demanding that I should be granted a visa. Bidault did not reply. Martin-Chauffier published an open letter entitled *Adieu Bidault!* But Bidault had become impervious to any kind of letter, sealed or open.

I decided to try my luck in Belgium and Switzerland where some of my French friends could come to see me. The Belgians gave me a fortnight's visa, which for those times was extremely liberal. The Belgian-Soviet Friendship Society arranged lectures for me in Brussels, Antwerp and Liège. The lectures were all well attended and the audiences were turbulent: everybody was apt to lose their composure at that period, friend and foe alike.

In Brussels I was invited to visit the Dowager Queen Elisabeth, widow of King Albert who had played so fine a part during the First World War. The impression the Queen produced on me was staggering. She was, of course, the first queen I had ever spoken to, but had she been an ordinary commoner I should have been equally impressed: she was seventy-four, yet she walked as briskly as a young girl, she drove a car, she sculpted and she was learning Russian. She talked to me about *The Storm*, which she had read in the original, showed me her sculptures, described her meetings with Romain Rolland, asked me whether I had seen Stalin recently and enquired after Oborin and Oistrakh. I could give her news of the musicians but said nothing about Stalin; it would have been difficult to explain to the Belgian Queen that it was far easier for a Soviet writer to meet *her* than Stalin. I mentioned the Stockholm Appeal, and she said she thought the wording excellent. We discovered we had one passion in common – gardening. I said I loved tuberoses and had vainly tried to get some bulbs in Brussels. (Some three months later I received a parcel in

Moscow from VOKS with an accompanying note: 'The enclosed bulbs have been addressed to your care of the Soviet Embassy in Brussels by the Dowager Queen Elisabeth'.) At the end of our conversation the Queen said she would come to my lecture: 'I shall sit in the Royal Box. Usually I sit in the stalls, but the press intends to ignore your lecture and if I'm in the Royal Box they'll be obliged to write about it'.

The Queen was as good as her word and the papers published a report of my lecture.

In Antwerp, near the Salle Rubens, the police were out in force. In spite of widespread unemployment the dockers were on strike, not only for higher wages but because they refused to unload American ships carrying arms. One American ship was forced to dock at night in the little port of Zeebrugge and unload its cargo of war material there. In order to discourage the strikers the authorities arrested the strike committee which included the docker Franz van den Branden, a member of Parliament. Nevertheless, the dockers refused to go back, and van den Branden went on hunger strike in protest against the illegal police measures. On 1st May the workers marched to the prison demanding the release of 'our Franz'. My lecture took place on the day van den Branden came out. We went to a café and drank his health and a toast to peace. Workers crowded round. Van den Branden, a tall lean Fleming, said: 'You may rest assured they won't bring military supplies to our port'. Later he and his comrades came to my lecture in the Salle Rubens. I spoke about Rublev, Picasso, the oneness of culture and about the Stockholm Appeal.

Thinking back to the spring of 1950 I realize that in those days everyone felt unsure of the future. 'War may break out tomorrow', could be heard at any street corner in any town. The five post-war years had been stormy, chequered and contradictory. The German Federal Republic was a year-old infant and Nato was also still in its cradle. Quite a few people thought that the course of events could be altered. A young Frenchman, an engineering worker, Raymond Agasse, arrived in Brussels: he had come to tell me about the dramatic events in the town of La Rochelle. The dockers had refused to load war material destined for Saigon. The authorities tried to disperse the dockers and take on blacklegs. Then the workers moved into the port. Agasse was arrested and sent for trial. On the day of the trial a red flag flew from the court building. Agasse kept saying: 'We won't work for

war. They won't get us to'. As he was telling me about these events in the lounge of the Palace Hotel, the ladies who had been quietly dozing in deep armchairs fled in alarm.

A fortnight later, in Geneva, friends from Marseilles described to me how the ship *Empire Marshall* was chasing all over the Mediterranean, unable to find a port for unloading. A comrade came from Nice to see me. Launching equipment for guided missiles was to be loaded there. The equipment had been chastely covered with branches of mimosa, but someone saw through the camouflage, the siren wailed and the workers came rushing to the port.

There was a lot of idealism in all this. Raymonde Dien celebrated her twenty-first birthday in prison. She received tens of thousands of greetings telegrams. What had she done? She had lain down on the railway track and held up an ammunitions train for a couple of hours. But her name was on the lips of millions of people; young men and girls everywhere drew inspiration from her action.

In those days life in post-war western Europe had not yet gone back to normal. In London blackened ruins gaped in the centre of the city. Flying over Germany I could see the skeletons of bombed towns. In England they still had ration-books. All over Europe people lived in poverty, anxiety and feverish activity. The French and Italian workers had lost their battle as far back as 1947, but it seemed to everybody that the fight was still being waged.

The Pentagon which, in conjunction with certain monopolies, determined American policy, was helped by the general fear of war. I am absolutely certain that Stalin did not want war, yet his name terrified not only the middle classes but the peasants, the intelligentsia and even some of the workers of western Europe. The French press stated that Soviet tanks could reach Dunkirk and Brest in a matter of days. Simone de Beauvoir records in her memoirs how writers asked one another when they met: 'What do you intend to do when Soviet troops approach Paris: leave or stay in occupied France?' Camus said to Sartre: 'You'll have to leave, they'll not only kill you but discredit you'. The tragedy of the Communists lay in their isolation, created by the suspicions of their neighbours, the fear of invasion and talk of a 'fifth column'. The dockers of Antwerp were not supported either by the Flemish peasants or by many of the Socialist trade unions.

In Liège my lecture was held at the Conservatoire. The Walloons are a temperamental people, and after the lecture they would not let

me go: I had to sign my name, in books – my own and other people's – on pages torn out of notebooks, on membership cards of the Belgian-Soviet Society and on every other kind of card. Suddenly an extremely tall autograph-hunter elbowed his way through the crowd and thrust a piece of paper at me. I was on the point of putting my name on it when the man bellowed: 'Your documents'. The paper turned out to be his police identification card: his purpose was to find out who was causing all this uproar.

But on the whole the attitude of the Belgian authorities was unexceptionable. It is true that when the Rector of Brussels University asked the Minister of Justice to prolong my visa by twenty-four hours to enable me to give the students a lecture on Russian literature, the Minister refused. But this was a symptom of the times.

Belgium lived better than her neighbour France: there were more goods in the shops and more customers. According to the Belgians it was 'all thanks to America'. The director of the Atomic Centre, Professor Cosyns, told me that Belgian scientists working on the problems of the peaceful utilization of atomic energy had no uranium. He recommended me to go to the Colonial Museum on the outskirts of Brussels. There I saw a lump of some dark mineral labelled: 'Uranium. Katanga, Shinkolobwe'. This was a clue to the Americans' affection for little Belgium.

Today, the memory of the museum and the word 'Katanga' are associated with something else: I think, as do most people, of the tragedy that took place ten years later and of Lumumba's fate. The exhibits in the museum were intended to bring home to people the wealth of the Congo and the inferiority of its natives: noble missionaries, cultured colonists and ugly, savage-looking Negroes. Uranium, gold, copper, tin, ivory, rubber. Ten years later rivers of blood could have been added to these treasures.

I met the Socialist Senator Henri Rollin. He had a number of unpleasant things to say about Soviet policy but, rather to my surprise, ended by observing that he found the Stockholm Appeal reasonable. Of course, I could not have imagined at the time that Rollin would become one of the initiators of the 'Round Table' meetings, that I would have friendly talks about literature with him at his house and that he would take the chair at a Brussels meeting where I spoke, to be followed by Jules Moch who opened with the words: 'My friend Ehrenburg has proposed . . .' I used to say that politics often

interfered with human relations: friendships were certainly broken by it but the converse also held, and former opponents came to smile benignly at one another. I used to think that So-and-so had greatly changed, and he, for his part, would be thinking that Ehrenburg had changed; probably we were all changing, and it was time that changed most of all.

Belgium surprised me by its contrasts. The centre of Brussels was far more brightly lit than Paris, neon signs blazed as wildly as on Broadway. But you had only to turn into some side-street to find little old women in caps gossiping on a warm summer evening in front of ancient houses. People read horrifying predictions in their newspaper about an atomic war and then went off to work, to exchange small-talk, to drink beer. In the old Flemish towns mirrors attached to the windows allowed inquisitive ladies to watch what was going on in the street without themselves being seen. The writers who entertained me at the PEN Club started with nervous talk about the threat of war but ended by discussing Sartre, Kafka and Mayakovsky.

I went to Ostend to see the painter Permeke. There were many ruined buildings along the coast. Driving past La Panne I recalled writing *Julio Jurenito*. Where was that hotel? All I could see was a charred scrap of wall.

In Brussels I went to see Franz Hellens. He said that there was muddle and blindness everywhere; it was difficult to get one's bearings. I surprised him by saying that the most difficult part was that we were contradicting ourselves.

Indeed, there were a lot of contradictions not only in Belgian life but in the mind of anyone pondering over them. I read articles by financial experts on the dividends from Upper Katanga, about the American 'A-B Group' Trust buying 1,600,000 shares from the British and the Belgians; the events of the day continued to disturb me. But then at the posthumous exhibition of James Ensor's works I was plunged into an altogether different world: uranium, van Zeeland and Dean Acheson vanished from my mind, and I gazed at lonely landscapes, a procession of pink masks, a solitary cabby asleep forever in the days of Verlaine and Mallarmé. It certainly does seem as if throughout almost the whole of my life I have lived simultaneously in two different worlds, two personalities co-existing in me, sometimes far from peacefully; that year I was most acutely aware of this.

I had applied for a Swiss visa before I left Moscow. In Brussels I was

asked to come to the Swiss embassy and was told that the visa would be granted on condition that I signed the following statement: 'I, the undersigned, pledge myself during my stay in Switzerland to abstain from all political activity whatsoever, in particular from giving lectures and appearing at meetings, both public and private, and also from holding press conferences'.

I amended this text by inserting the word 'political' before 'meetings'. The official said he would consult Berne by telephone. After I had waited for an hour the diplomat informed me sullenly that I was not to appear at any meetings, whether political or cultural, religious or literary. He added that I should be free to attend religious services and go to the cinema.

When I arrived in Switzerland a conference of Swiss writers was being held at St Gallen. I received an invitation but the authorities reminded me of my promise not to attend meetings. I did not even dare go to a concert of Czech music.

Neutral Switzerland had been drawn into the whirlpool of the cold war. In Zurich I was handed a circular put out by the Stock Exchange agency 'Afida': '... The fact that Russia has the atom bomb too will step up the pace of American rearmament. In consequence there is a good deal of liveliness observed in so-called "War-Babies", that is shares in enterprises which, during the Second World War, rose as a result of military contracts. We include a brief description of the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, whose shares have a higher-than-average yield of 6.7 per cent'.

I also acquainted myself with the views of a teacher who was dictating an exercise in translating from French into German to the senior pupils of a secondary school in Sion: '... Let the Russians come, they will learn what our courage is. We shall take revenge on those bears for our friends strangled and our wives abducted. Those robbers are out to deprive us of our fatherland; they have already assembled their troops and reached the foothills of our Alps'.

Naturally I met Swiss people who were not interested in shares and had no use for hatred: the conductor Ansermet in Geneva, the theologian Karl Barth in Basel, the painter Erni in Lucerne. I should like to say something here about that remarkable Hellenist André Bonnard. I had first met him at the Paris Peace Congress. Now he invited me to come and see him in Lausanne. We talked about Mycenae, Soviet poetry and peace. Later I read his books and they helped me to

understand classical Greek culture much better. I met Bonnard several times, I went to see him again in Lausanne and talked to him at various peace congresses. The reason why I mention him in this chapter is because the evening of his life was gravely affected by the cold war. He was three years older than I and one of the last Western humanists of that generation. He had never concerned himself with politics but was among the first to join the peace movement. In 1952, when he was on his way to a meeting of the World Peace Council, he was arrested in Zurich on the ludicrous charge of having divulged State secrets. He was tried eighteen months later and given a suspended sentence of fifteen years' imprisonment. This sentence makes the absurdity of the accusation abundantly clear, but the Berne judges had not dared to acquit him for fear of turning it into an indictment of the Swiss police.

One does not often come across such disinterested, supremely honest and upright men as Bonnard. He loved the poetry of classical Greece, her monuments, the vitality of her art; he loved the students who attended his lectures and he loved the whole world. At his trial he said: 'You must now pronounce sentence. This is a matter for your conscience. Mine is clear. My humanism has been mentioned here. What I understand by humanism is not an academic philosophy for the scholar, but a code of laws governing a man's life. I also wish to point out that it is a mistake to try to prove that the humanist in me is only one aspect of my personality dubiously associated with another which has been too sweepingly labelled 'Communist'. The truth is that Hellenism has been for me a life-long and all-absorbing discipline. Attempts have been made here to dissociate the translator of *Antigone* from the partisan of peace, but in fact the two are one and the same man. No, your Lordships, I am not as has been represented here a creature leading a double life . . . Do not imagine that literature exists only to be read, it is created that it may become part of life itself. If it did not teach the art of living, it would be nothing more than a pastime and I should never have devoted my life to it'.

It was a terrible epoch when books were treated as if they were bombs, when peaceful and neutral Switzerland could put on trial a man like André Bonnard, the pride of his country, and attempt to smear him. But when the trial was over, he said with a hopeful smile: 'Things will be easier for our children'.

I spent ten days in Switzerland; friends came to see me from Paris, Grenoble, Marseilles, Lyons and Nice; I listened and took notes, and

in the evening sat on a café terrace by the lake which seemed to me by turns a momentarily calm sea and an artificial pool made for the benefit of sedate English ladies and tourists from Oklahoma. Gazing at the watery expanse I thought for the thousandth time what a strange play life is, a tragedy that turns into a farce, one actor laughing while another unaccountably weeps, and I reflected that to accept what is happening on the stage one has to be either very wise or an utter fool. The average man can only work, read the newspapers, gaze at the lake – if there is one handy – and not try to unravel the over-complicated author's plot.

Denise came for a few hours. We looked at one another for a long time, perhaps in a new attempt to understand what had happened to us. Then I said: 'It all took place in another life'. She agreed and smiled vaguely, a smile that I remembered well from long ago.

My visa expired. I went to Berlin. There the cold war had become a way of life. In East Berlin on Trinity Day a Youth Meeting was being held. Young men and girls in blue shirts and blouses marched, sang and listened to speeches. All this among the ruins. One side of the Potsdamer Platz belonged to the Democratic Republic, on the other side American soldiers were stationed. Boys in blue shirts threw batches of leaflets across with the picture of Picasso's dove. In reply oranges hurtled through the air and a young fellow in a check shirt yelled: 'You don't have any oranges!'

People constantly crossed the frontier going to work, visiting relations or shopping. I made several trips to West Berlin. Opposite the Romanisches Café where long ago I had sat with Moholy-Nagy, Mayakovsky, Walter Mehring and Tuwim, was one of the places where people changed east marks into west marks. The same traffic was carried on by hundreds of money-changers in booths or the patched-up ground floors of ruined houses. The rate of exchange in those days was fantastic: for one west mark they asked seven east ones. It cost one mark to get a shave in either part of the city. Practical-minded citizens of the western sector got themselves shaved in the east, which meant they were six marks to the good. Housewives from the west bought vegetables in the east, while housewives of the eastern sector took home coffee, oranges and bananas in their shopping bags. Shops in the Potsdamer Strasse carried on a brisk trade in British textiles; thrifty inhabitants of Charlottenburg took cheviot tweeds to tailors in the Alexanderplatz: the finished suit would cost a third of the

price. In the Kurfürstendamm people danced the samba, drank hock and ogled shrill half-naked singers. But serious theatregoers went to East Berlin to see a Brecht play. There was a good deal of unemployment in West Berlin but the Americans spent freely enough: what they had here was not a city but a showcase for the capitalist paradise; the unemployed received a dole of 100 marks a month and told their friends and relations who lived in East Berlin: 'We don't work and we get the equivalent of 700 of your marks'.

There were many bookshops in East Berlin. Pillars were plastered with political posters and announcements; advertisements for Schiller's *Die Räuber* and a discussion on 'Do We Need Art?'. West Berlin was full of commercial advertisements and small shops displayed luxury goods. The restaurants, cafés and cabarets in the Kurfürstendamm were overcrowded. The shop-signs were reminders of the past: Mappe liqueurs, Kempinski Restaurant. I was ten years old when I first ate sausages at Aschinger's. Everything had crumbled: Wilhelm's Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, but here staring me in the face were Aschinger's sausages. It is true that the premises were different – a snack-bar in a half-ruined house – but the petit bourgeois could feel satisfied that life was being restored: the old, familiar, well-remembered life.

The loudspeakers of the two Berlins inveighed against each other from morning till night. This, like much else, was reminiscent of the wartime front. The West Berlin press had announced that the Reds were organizing a Youth Meeting to seize the whole city. American, French and British tanks and guns had been brought into position. But there were neither shells nor bullets, only a great many leaflets and a few oranges.

War has its own laws; inevitably it impoverishes man's spiritual world, simplifies his judgments, makes saints of one's own people and monsters of the enemy. This cold war was very much like any other war. If one saw Moscow and New York as the rear, the Berliners were living in the front line.

In East Berlin I met Brecht, Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig. The West Berlin papers attacked them, saying they had 'sold out to Moscow', were 'careerists' and 'trimmers'. This was silly, for any East Berliner could cross the Potsdamer Platz and find himself in the world which the West called 'free', and west marks were a better bribe than east. Anna Seghers had come to the Democratic Republic from

Mexico, Brecht from the USA, Zweig from Palestine. But even in East Berlin there were critics who attacked one or other of these writers. I remember having a long argument with the kind of man who is alien from and even hostile to art. He insisted that in Anna Seghers' novel, *The Dead Stay Young*, one could detect a sneaking sympathy with the Nazis and even some anti-Semitic undertones; that Zweig was 'half-zionist, half-mystic, with one eye on Israel and the other on the West'; as for Brecht, he was an 'impenitent formalist', a pigheaded man opposed to the realistic representation of life, and his plays were 'contrived fantasy'. I retorted that no one had dragged Zweig from Palestine to Berlin, that Anna Seghers could not be an anti-Semite since she was herself a Jewess and her own mother had been killed by the Nazis in Auschwitz, and as for the excess of 'contrived fantasy', it was better not to mention it in Berlin, that city being fantastic beyond anything thought of by Brecht or, for that matter, by Poe or Goya. I need not have got so heated about it: there are people who can talk but not listen.

I had known Brecht for a long time; it was not easy to talk to him: he often seemed abstracted, though this impression was misleading, for he listened, observed a great deal and occasionally broke into a laugh. However, he was always surrounded by the atmosphere of his own world, neither Paris nor Berlin, but a certain country which I privately named 'Brechtia'. His conceits, like his philosophy and his poetry, were not a literary mannerism but were part of his very nature: he was not simply a poet but an incorrigible one. He always wore a short jacket, no tie, and smoked strong black cigars; he was unassuming in manner and soft of speech, yet in spite of this many people, like myself, felt disturbed in his presence. I rather think this was owing to the over-intense inner life of this taciturn and seemingly absentminded man.

I remember our last meeting at Anna Seghers'. It was in the autumn of 1955, barely a year before his death. Anna asked: 'What other writers since Babel have been rehabilitated?' I had brought her an old popular print: Prince Bova challenging Death to a duel. Brecht asked me to translate the legend and looked very much on the alert; I felt the familiar disquiet.

In his book on Brecht a West German writer says that the poet was 'cunning' and 'calculating' in his decisions. But Brecht's 'cunning' was that of a child and all his 'calculations' were those of a poet.

I went back to Moscow at the beginning of June and described my travels and Berlin. Savich asked me: 'Well, what's your view, will there be a war?' and I replied: 'Out of the question'. Once again I proved a wretched prophet: a fortnight later the war in Korea broke out, threatening for a long time to become a global war.

23

WE LIVED in the country near New Jerusalem. The summer was exceptionally wet and I spent practically all day writing articles and in the evening listened to the radio. I was planning to start on a novel when the telephone rang and I was told that I had to go to London to attend a bureau meeting; contrary to expectations the British had granted me a visa.

At the airport I was met by English friends in the peace movement and by one of our embassy secretaries who took me to an hotel. It was a luxurious room with a private bathroom and I looked forward to a good night's sleep. In the *Evening Standard* I came across a small item under the heading: 'Why Did They Let Ilya In?' I had always thought the British more inclined to formality than familiarity and the paragraph puzzled me. During the night I was awakened several times by noisy shouting and wondered sleepily why Englishmen should be yelling in the streets at night. It used not to be like that. In the morning the manager told me that I had been the unwitting cause of the disturbance: a Mosleyite fascist had brought a portable stand and had mounted it and hurled abuse at me: I was responsible for the war in Korea and had come to England for purposes of subversion and so on. Since the right of free speech is guaranteed by Magna Carta the police protected the orator. The manager said that many of the guests had complained and he was compelled to ask me to go to some other hotel.

At the embassy I was told that it was difficult to find accommodation in London in the summer, and just then there was some kind of congress and an important sports event going on. After spending half a day at the meeting and having made my speech (that is, preached to the converted that peace is better than war), I went to the address I had been given. This was a third-class seedy hotel where I was shown to a tiny attic. I had a wash and before I had quite collected myself I was fetched to meet Labour members of parliament in the Palace of Westminster.

The Korean War had upset everybody; people feared that it might

develop into a Third World War. The English press claimed that North Korea had started it. Korea was far away and the Labour MPs knew no more than I did what had happened on 25th July on the 38th Parallel, which did not prevent them from regarding the Communists as the aggressors. To be sure there was no unanimity among the Labour MPs and some of them said that even if the operations had been started by North Korean troops, Syngman Rhee deserved neither respect nor support. But those were few (I remember two of them: Emrys Hughes and S. O. Davies). The majority expressed indignation at 'Moscow's Korean satellites'. It was altogether more like an interrogation than a conversation and it lasted till 9 o'clock.

People dine early in London and the MPs had dined before our meeting. Emrys Hughes took me to the bar where we had some beer. By the time we came out all the restaurants were shut. I rang up the embassy and told them that I and an English Communist who had kindly consented to be my interpreter were ravenously hungry. At the embassy we were given a meal of Riga sprats and Chatka crabmeat, a veritable feast. The reckoning was quick to follow: when my taxi reached the hotel at 1 a.m. I was told that the room had been let to me by mistake; my things had been packed in my absence and my suitcase was with the porter. I protested but the porter was too sleepy to reply. I had to return to the embassy where everybody was in bed. The staff member on duty said I could lie down on the sofa in the waiting-room but that he could not provide any bedding, not even a pillow.

In the morning Ivor Montagu, who had come to fetch me and had taken me to the meeting, suddenly announced that it was time for us to go to a press conference which had been arranged for me. I said I could not possibly face the reporters in a crumpled shirt and would have to go back and change. London is a very large city and Montagu objected to the waste of time: 'Better buy a new shirt'. 'But where could I put it on?' 'In the lavatory'. When we arrived at the press conference there were some hundred and fifty journalists already waiting. Montagu proved an able strategist: with two other friends in the peace movement he blocked the way to the lavatory to give me a chance to change my shirt.

I must confess that after the press conference I was obliged to change it again: the hall was packed and the journalists behaved in such a provocative manner that it made me sweat. I realized that I must remain calm for the sake of those who were genuinely interested in my

answers, but outward composure cost me a considerable effort. I had attended hundreds of press conferences but had never known anything like this. I was constantly interrupted. One reporter rushed up to me shouting: 'Don't hedge, just answer yes or no'.

A meeting was organized in Trafalgar Square. A large crowd of people gathered. The Associated Press put the number at ten thousand, TASS at twenty thousand; there were probably some fifteen thousand. I looked round the square, then at Nelson's column, and felt slightly overwhelmed; however, I quickly pulled myself together and made my speech. Immediately after, it started to rain and the crowd thinned. When the meeting was over I wanted a smoke. I had a box of Soviet matches in my pocket with a hammer and sickle on it. A journalist asked me to let him have the box. On the next day an account of my speech was accompanied by a photograph: 'Matches with which Ilya intends to set fire to England'. In another newspaper I found this item: 'Ilya Ehrenburg would like to write a new novel: *The Fall of London*'. Montagu found me a room in an hotel where I was not disturbed — no small achievement. In fact, Montagu came to my rescue many times.

I had met him first in 1948 at the Wroclaw Conference, and in the course of the next fifteen years I was to see him at all the meetings and councils of the peace movement. He made no speeches but worked extremely hard. He looks more like one of the Rotonde habitués of my youth than a proper English gentleman. He is in the habit of wearing layers of coloured sweaters and cardigans which he peels off one by one as the session progresses. The story of his life is also rather strange. He grew up in a rich home. His father was a peer and a Liberal. In early youth Ivor was fired with enthusiasm by the October Revolution, and he visited Moscow. Later he joined the Communist Party. He took me once to the working-class districts in the east end of London. People in the street recognized him, and some of them stopped to talk to him: he had frequently worked for Communist candidates at election time in these parts. His earliest interest was zoology and he presented a number of animals to the Zoo. On one occasion he was taking a bear-cub from Leningrad to London on a Soviet ship. On the third day out the cub went to sleep in Montagu's cabin and slept for the rest of the voyage. The crew admitted that the cub had been making a nuisance of itself by prowling all over the ship and leaving a mess, so they had hit on the plan of making it drunk and had given it their entire

vodka ration. Later Montagu took up cinematography and worked with Eisenstein in Hollywood. He is still busy on film and television problems. Another of his enthusiasms that must be mentioned is table-tennis; he is President of the International Federation of this sport. Ivor is interested in art; he is a trustful sort of person and at the same time rather obstinate; in short he is someone whom I have always found it easy to understand, although his mental processes are a trifle involved and his French is so peculiar that it often sounds more like English. In 1950, when the position of British Communists was particularly difficult, Montagu was able to hold good-tempered conversations with his political opponents; his unusual personality must have been disarming.

A well-known English writer who had not been present at my press conference but was at that time hostile to the Soviet Union, compared me to a 'large German sheepdog' and advised me to make speedy tracks for Moscow. I shall not name him: we made each other's acquaintance later, and a few years after that he revised his attitude towards the peace movement and, by the same token, to me.

Things went worse over a speech made in parliament by a Labour member. (I shall not name him either, as I never met him again and do not know what his present attitude is; I put the particular incident down to the climate of the cold war.) The staff of the *New Statesman* invited me to lunch and that is where I met him. We had a long conversation lasting some three hours, with Montagu acting as interpreter from French into English. The main topic was naturally peace and war. I referred to an interesting article I had read in *Le Monde* and said that neither the French nor the English seemed to want to fight, and that the mood of the man-in-the-street was vastly different from that of the politicians and from what the newspapers said. Soon after, speaking in the House of Commons, this Labour MP mentioned having lunched with me. A Conservative member interrupted him by asking how an English MP could sit down to table with Ilya Ehrenburg. The Labour man replied that one had to know the enemy, and followed this up by alleging that I had said the French and the English were physically and morally incapable of fighting. He compared me to Ribbentrop who had told Hitler that the English would not offer any resistance. When I read the account of this speech I wrote to *The Times*, and so did Montagu. But such refutations interest hardly anyone and the harm had been done; Ehrenburg was no better than Ribbentrop, a

German sheepdog, a man who was behind Red aggression against Great Britain.

Six months earlier a right-wing French newspaper had written: 'It would be foolish to allow Ilya Ehrenburg into France again. We know this individual only too well. In Red Russia he plays the same role as that played in Germany by Friedrich Sieburg who, while professing a love for France, was paving the way for the Wehrmacht. The author of *The Storm* is paving the way for the Stalin legions. Ehrenburg would be another GPU agent in France. And what an agent! He is familiar with the Paris 'jungle', he is accepted in various social circles, he is a favourite with the aesthetes and snobs, he would become the key link in an endless chain of espionage'.

I was invited by the British Peace Committee to meet representatives of an organization which unites a dozen pacifist movements, leagues and societies: Quakers, Tolstoyans and conscientious objectors. Among those I met I noticed Zilliacus, a man with whom ten years later I made friends. But there seemed to be mistrust, even suspicion in the air – that is what the times were like. We discussed the possibility of common action to end the war in Korea. Gradually I succeeded in dispersing the unfriendly atmosphere and the conversation was just about to take a favourable turn when everything was spoilt by the secretary of the British Peace Committee coming up to me and whispering: 'Are you feeling tired? Shall I ask them to get you a cup of tea?' The whole mood changed; the others did not know that the whispering was about a cup of tea and they started whispering among themselves: I had become a wolf in sheep's clothing.

On Saturday, in the course of the afternoon, at the time when all English people, rich and poor, right-wing and left-wing, enjoy their tea, a strange spectacle greeted me as I was approaching our embassy: a crowd of young men, cameramen and police were gathered outside it. Apparently a few minutes earlier some young Mosleyites had started throwing stones at the embassy windows; there were no police about at the time but the cameramen had been alerted beforehand and had taken pictures of this demonstration of 'popular protest against the Reds' aggression in Korea' (that was how the papers described the stone-throwing incident). Inside, the ambassador, Zarubin showed me the stones. The room was swept, the broken glass cleared away. In my presence the ambassador rang up the Foreign Secretary, Bevin, who was on holiday in the country, and asked for an immediate interview.

Then he began to dictate a note of protest. I was witnessing this sort of thing for the first time and, seeing how interested I was, Zarubin suggested that I should wait for his return. After his talk with Bevin he told me that the Foreign Minister had hemmed and hawed, put the blame on hooligans, promised to take measures and so on.

I went to Cambridge where Montagu took me to see one of the most outstanding physicists, Dirac. I was very kindly received. When I mentioned the Stockholm Appeal, Dirac said he considered the atom bomb a crime but added that he did not go in for politics. When his schoolboy son came in and asked me to autograph *The Fall of Paris*, Dirac said: 'There's the younger generation for you. He's a Red'. I replied that in the eyes of the *Daily Mail* he himself was a Red because he detested the cold war and spoke of Joliot-Curie with respect. Dirac laughed. (Joliot-Curie had told me that Dirac had made an important discovery in quantum mechanics before he was thirty.) For a couple of hours, listening to this interesting man with a really original mind, I forgot about the cold war. After lunch Dirac cautiously asked me what had happened to his friend Kapitsa: the newspapers had given out that he had been arrested. Just before leaving Moscow I had heard that Kapitsa (who had somehow incurred Stalin's displeasure) was still working, so I told Dirac that he was at large and had his own laboratory. I felt that both Dirac and his wife wanted to believe me but were not quite able to. Mrs Dirac asked me whether I could take back some skeins of knitting wool for Kapitsa's wife. Two pairs of eyes stared fixedly at me: I said I should be glad to deliver the present. There was a general feeling of relief.

It was in London that I had my first heart-to-heart talks with Bernal. He had been both at Wroclaw and Paris but I had seen him there only at meetings, whereas in London he invited me to his house. Later we often met and had long talks and I grew to like him very much. In many ways he fits one's idea of the true man of learning, always forgetting or losing something, and with an unruly head of hair. But in fact he remembers everything and reacts very strongly to a great many matters. During the war Churchill consulted him on various occasions, and a service cap had to be made specially for him owing to his outsize head. One day he told me about the circumstances in which he had made his major discovery. It was in the thirties; a delegation of English scientists had been to Moscow. They were leaving from the central airport. Their departure was delayed by bad weather, it was raining

hard. There was no waiting-room for the passengers. Bernal stood under an awning and it was there that the idea of the structure of water came to him. He imparted it to his companion, the physicist R. Fowler. On the plane they told their other colleagues who urged Bernal to set it down as soon as he got back.

Bernal has given and still gives much of his time to the peace movement.

Here is a quotation from a letter he wrote to me in September 1954 (at 4 a.m., he said): 'I have been given a room in a far too luxurious hotel. My apartments are richly decorated in good academic taste, with pictures painted in real oil-colours, and I know that they might be even worse. To help me to sleep there is a bright street-lamp shining opposite my window, and under it there is a taxi-rank; the drivers start up their engines and talk together loudly; if I could understand the language their conversation would probably entertain me. A programme has been worked out for the few days I can spend in Moscow: a ride in the metro, Gorky Street and on Sunday to see the architecture of the agricultural exhibition. This is my eighth visit to Moscow; I know a dozen clever, interesting people in this city, but instead of giving me the opportunity to talk to them, when there are so many engrossing things happening in the world, I am being treated like a sacred cow'.

He is a tremendously wide-awake person, everything interests him. In the letter from which I have just quoted, he uses Villon's line: '*Je meurs de soif auprès de la source*'. One day he talked to me about the remarkable early seventeenth-century English poet, John Donne, whose line Hemingway took for the title of his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. On another occasion we discussed Picasso.

Once when he came to my place in New Jerusalem we went for a walk. Bernal saw a heap of stones near a house and picked them up to examine them, putting some in his pocket. Lyuba said: 'But they've been dumped here from somewhere else, they're probably meant for paving the road'. Bernal threw the stones away, then picked them up again and, looking round with a slightly guilty air, put three or four back into his pocket. When we got home, he broke the stones and showed me one with the fossilized imprint of a sea shell, saying he was going to take it back to London with him.

I took him to the neighbourhood of Volokolamsk where a handsome sixteenth-century monastery still stands on the lakeside.

Although there is an inscription over the gates announcing that the building is under State protection, there was no one guarding it. In the tower where Vassily Shuisky had been imprisoned we saw a pig; washing was hanging up to dry in the chapel with its peeling frescoes. It was a cold autumn day; the car kept skidding and we had to walk half a mile over heavy clay soil; our shoes were constantly pulled off, and Bernal retrieved his standing on one leg like a stork. When we got back he said it had been a wonderful day.

Now in London I tried to escape from the deathly climate of the cold war by talking to Bernal, by wandering along the Embankment and by absorbing the unsmiling beauty of the vast living city, or by going to the National Gallery to look at the landscapes by Turner who, half a century before the French Impressionists, laid the foundations of modern painting.

In an evening paper I came across an article headed: 'When is Ilya Ehrenburg taking himself off?' This was on the day of my departure.

As we flew low over London I looked through the plane's small window: houses like children's bricks, the red blobs of buses, recreation grounds, parks, cars – a scale-model of a great city. I thought of the people at the meeting, the way Bernal smiles, rumpling his already rumpled hair as he talks; I recalled, too, the shouting voice under my window, the journalists, the broken window-panes.

This chapter has turned out rather lengthy and disconnected; I was trying to convey the lunacy of the cold war and into my mind came some of the people who had won my regard by their humanity, their steadiness, their resistance to the climate of opinion and mood surrounding them. Ten years later a 'Round Table' meeting was held in a room in the Palace of Westminster; not only Labour members but even Conservatives talked to Soviet diplomats affably. And much else that I have described here seems now to belong to the remote past, although it was less than fifteen years ago. It is true that on our side, too, there was a good deal that was unnecessary, unjust and harsh in relation to this or that individual, but it would not be a bad thing if some people in the West paused to consider their share of the responsibility. I called my novel *The Thaw* and started to write it late in 1953. Western journalists seemed to like the title and have rather flatteringly adopted it, but in 1950 they were doing their best to intensify the blackest of frosts, and that is a thing which ought not to be forgotten.

24

I HAVE talked about the madness which seized the world in 1950. I should like to look into my own responsibility. Naturally I could not be perfectly calm or restrained in my judgments: I was not observing the cold war from outside, I was living in it. My feelings when I turned the pages of a copy of *Collier's Magazine* devoted to a future war against the Soviet Union can be imagined. After describing the destruction of Soviet towns, *Collier's* depicted Moscow occupied by the Americans: the factories sold or leased to foreign industrialists, the Red Army Theatre, renamed The New World, showing the popular American musical *Guys and Dolls*, an important Moscow newspaper printing on its front page the reminiscences of the film star Jenny James *How I Loved and Lost in Sarawak*. I published a sharp retort and could not have done less.

This was in 1949, when I did not yet realize the muddleheadedness of the Western intelligentsia, and I daresay I was unjust at times. I read a book by the English philosopher Bertrand Russell in which he propagated the idea of 'World Government'. This idea still seems to me unacceptable because it would lead to world domination by capitalism, but I ought not to have treated Russell as an apologist for the ruling classes.

I also regret an article of mine in which, while defending Faulkner, I attacked Sartre, describing him as a 'caustic, coldly cerebral drawing-room writer'. I had just read his play *Les Mains Sales*, a witty satire which I took to be aimed at the Communists. It is hard to say now why I called Sartre a drawing-room writer. In those days I scarcely knew him, for our two meetings – one before the war, the other in 1946 – had been quite brief. In France, as well as in other western countries, Sartre's name was on everyone's lips; he was not only discussed amongst students but ladies of no profession and uncertain age twitted about him at parties and receptions. When I got to know him I found that he was a clever and unassuming man to whom fame was a burden which he called 'stupid': he was well aware that many of those who spoke of him with reverence, or with indignation, had never read a word he had written.

In our age politics is not reserved for specialists but is a compulsory subject for everyone; it is only in exceptional cases that it can be avoided. Sartre's political line may seem hard to follow because of its many zigzags. In 1948 he considered himself a representative of the 'third force': somewhere midway between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the Soviet Union and the USA. But this no man's land turned out to be non-existent and *Les Mains Sales* became a weapon for America and the bourgeoisie.

At the Vienna Peace Congress Sartre was the star turn: he was one of the first speakers and when he ended he was given a standing ovation.

From 1952 to 1956 he defended the Soviet Union against the attacks of the French press; he travelled to Moscow, gave appreciative interviews and took part in the World Peace Assembly in Helsinki.

After the Hungarian events he declared publicly that he intended to break off relations with his friends amongst Soviet writers, but a year later he conversed with me quite peaceably and was rather more on the defensive than anything else.

All this appears puzzling, especially if one remembers December 1952, when Sartre definitely abandoned his illusory neutrality and turned towards the Soviet Union. By way of explanation I should like to describe some of Sartre's personal traits. Once I had made a friend of him, and of Simone de Beauvoir, much became clear to me.

By inclination and natural gifts Sartre is a writer, but his literary work and his perception of life derive from that other side of his intellectual activity, namely, philosophy. At the Vienna Peace Congress he said: 'The thought and politics of today lead us to massacre because they are abstract. The world has been cut in two and each half is afraid of the other. Henceforth everyone acts in ignorance of the wishes and the decisions of his neighbour on the other side; conjectures are made, nobody believes what is said, words are interpreted and attitudes are adopted on the assumption of what the adversary will do. Thereupon the only possible position is that expressed in the thousand-year-old fallacy: if you want peace, prepare for war, which is a triumph of abstraction. Men become abstract. Each of them is "the other" (*l'autrui*), the possible enemy, to be distrusted. In my country it is rare to meet a man: most people are just titles and labels'.

Eager to understand the events of his time Sartre is deeply and acutely sensitive. He is not much inclined to observe; he thinks, he

deduces and his perception of what he sees and hears is entirely emotional. I once acted as his interpreter when I took him to see an agronomist I knew, a gifted man who rather enjoyed throwing dust into people's eyes. 'He's our Tartarin,' I warned Sartre. The agronomist asked: 'How much milk does a French cow yield?' 'I'd rather not say, I'm no expert.' 'I understand; you write books. But would you say, at a rough guess, that it yields 50 litres a day?' 'I think cows of that sort are put on exhibition.' 'Tell him I'll show him people who've never so much as been to an exhibition in their lives and whose cows yield 50 litres a day.' Although warned, Sartre believed every word. Afterwards the agronomist said to me: 'A good chap, that Frenchman, a nice simple-minded fellow'. In Paris I told Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir about the Moscow Tartarin's praise. Simone laughed: 'By and large, he's right. Sartre really is naive'. Sartre himself gave an embarrassed smile.

The cold cerebral quality for which I criticized Sartre fifteen years ago does not arise from lack of heart but, on the contrary, from a highly sensitive conscience, very similar to that of the Russian writers of the second half of the nineteenth century; but being a philosopher, he is inclined to think in generalized categories and, while hating abstractions, becomes abstract himself. As for his wild political zig-zags, these are explicable by his very nature: what in another man would take the form of interior monologue, doubts, days or years of silence, are, in the case of Sartre, exteriorized in pronouncements and disclosures in a series of interviews; in short, in actions. Once this had become clear to me I regretted my article of 1949.

My trips to the West, which I have described, enabled me to assess the climate of the cold war better. 'There are no problems in the world that cannot be resolved by agreement,' I wrote in *Pravda*. 'We have never intended nor do we now intend to prove the rightness of our ideas by force of arms . . . We regard the treasures of any civilization as precious - be they "eastern" or "western", "southern" or "northern". We offer peace not only to our friends but also to those who do not like us: there is room for all under the sun, and the future will show who is right.' In November 1950, at the Second Peace Congress I said: 'I stand for peace, for peace not only with the America of Paul Robeson and Howard Fast, but also for peace with the America of Mr Truman and Mr Acheson . . . We live on one planet. However, it has plenty of room on it for the adherents of different social systems. They

can come to an agreement that no one will break down the doors of someone else's house just because they do not like its owner's ideas, and that no one will throw stones at a neighbour's windows just because the neighbour thinks differently, speaks differently, lives differently . . . We must concern ourselves not only with the prohibition of war propaganda but also with the creation of the moral conditions necessary for the peaceful coexistence of various States. It is necessary to cease developing in the growing generation disrespect for and hostility to other peoples. It is necessary to fight against all manifestations of national and racial arrogance. The development of human culture is incompatible with isolation, with the creation of artificial barriers, with wholesale attacks on the culture and life of other peoples . . . It is necessary to change the climate of the world, to dispel mutual lack of confidence . . .'

Today such arguments are a commonplace, but in 1950 our own press reporting my speech deleted the words about the destructive effect of barriers to culture and the necessity to dispel mutual lack of confidence. All I could do was to repeat those words at every conference and at meetings with readers. (A few years later the situation changed. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published an article by a former monarchist émigré who had returned from America. In his exhilaration – psychologically understandable – he wrote that there was no such thing as American culture. I wrote a letter to the editor saying that the United States had a culture of its own, and a considerable one, as well as outstanding scientists and writers. While pointing out that the editorial board did not share my views, the paper published my letter. But that was in 1955, not 1950.)

At the time of which I am now speaking I travelled abroad a good deal. In 1950, after leaving London, I went to Prague, Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm; then I attended a congress in Warsaw; in 1951 there were meetings of the World Peace Council in Berlin, of the bureau in Copenhagen and Helsinki, then once again in Scandinavia and in Vienna. Across my memory there slides a discontinuous yet monotonous film-strip, a series of committees and subcommittees, and of problems which have not yet, alas, gone into history – the armaments race, the creation of the *Bundeswehr*, the growing obstacles to economic and cultural exchanges – of night sessions, meetings in spring in the park at Copenhagen with Danish women in traditional costume, in Helsinki in the station square, in Vienna near the Parlia-

ment building. The secretariat of the World Peace Council had its headquarters in Prague; I had to go there for several weeks running before each congress.

I tried to draw various political and cultural figures into the movement; I sometimes succeeded but more often I met with a polite rebuff. In Copenhagen I approached the Liberal deputy, Elin Appel. She was utterly opposed to the preparations for a Third World War but there were things about our movement which she found uncongenial: some she thought wrong though she approved of others. I had long talks with her and eventually persuaded her to attend the congress in Warsaw. (At the next elections she did not get back into parliament.) In her Warsaw speech she said that she agreed with some of the proposals but not with all and appealed to the 'representatives of the Eastern countries to ponder over their mistakes as I ponder over my own errors'. Two years later she spoke at the congress in Vienna. After saying that I had 'opened her eyes to a world previously unknown' to her, she expressed disagreement with much of what I had said: 'Are you quite sure, Ilya Ehrenburg, that you and those who think like you bear no responsibility at all for our fears?'

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can come to an agreement that no one will break down the doors of someone else's house just because they do not like its owner's ideas, and that no one will throw stones at a neighbour's windows just because the neighbour thinks differently, speaks differently, lives differently . . . We must concern ourselves not only with the prohibition of war propaganda but also with the creation of the moral conditions necessary for the peaceful coexistence of various States. It is necessary to cease developing in the growing generation disrespect for and hostility to other peoples. It is necessary to fight against all manifestations of national and racial arrogance. The development of human culture is incompatible with isolation, with the creation of artificial barriers, with wholesale attacks on the culture and life of other peoples . . . It is necessary to change the climate of the world, to dispel mutual lack of confidence . . .'

Today such arguments are a commonplace, but in 1950 our own press reporting my speech deleted the words about the destructive effect of barriers to culture and the necessity to dispel mutual lack of confidence. All I could do was to repeat those words at every conference and at meetings with readers. (A few years later the situation changed. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published an article by a former monarchist émigré who had returned from America. In his exhilaration – psychologically understandable – he wrote that there was no such thing as American culture. I wrote a letter to the editor saying that the United States had a culture of its own, and a considerable one, as well as outstanding scientists and writers. While pointing out that the editorial board did not share my views, the paper published my letter. But that was in 1955, not 1950.)

At the time of which I am now speaking I travelled abroad a good deal. In 1950, after leaving London, I went to Prague, Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm; then I attended a congress in Warsaw; in 1951 there were meetings of the World Peace Council in Berlin, of the bureau in Copenhagen and Helsinki, then once again in Scandinavia and in Vienna. Across my memory there slides a discontinuous yet monotonous film-strip, a series of committees and subcommittees, and of problems which have not yet, alas, gone into history – the armaments race, the creation of the *Bundeswehr*, the growing obstacles to economic and cultural exchanges – of night sessions, meetings in spring in the park at Copenhagen with Danish women in traditional costume, in Helsinki in the station square, in Vienna near the Parlia-

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bacteriologist Thorvald Madsen. He was then eighty-two. He received me kindly, offered me sherry and started reading the document which had been translated from Korean into Chinese, from Chinese into Russian and from Russian into English. After the first page he handed it back to me: 'Put this away, young man, and don't show it to anyone. It's enough to make a first-year student laugh'. He said he sympathized with our efforts for peace and was altogether most friendly. As for me, I felt extremely uncomfortable and only much later that night smiled as I recalled his 'young man': I was in my sixties and nobody had called me that for a very long time.

As I said, the secretariat of the World Council of Peace was in Prague. The General Secretary, Jean Laffitte, was a good-natured man who had a gift for reconciling disputants. He seemed phlegmatic, even indolent, but in fact he was a hard worker. His assistants were the Chinese poet Emi Siao, the American Congregationalist minister Darr, the Brazilian Borsari, the Welshman Roy Gore, the Italian Socialist Fenoaltea and the Russian P. R. Gulayev. Gulayev, once he had got his bearings, showed himself tactful and intelligent; he displayed the best qualities of the generation which had grown up in the thirties, he had not become bureaucratic and did not live in mortal fear, although his position was far from easy. When he died everybody realized what a valuable part he had played in the movement.

The secretariat had its headquarters in a large house on the banks of the Vltava. Whenever I arrived I was given a room where I sat poring over piles of documents; it was detailed and tedious, finicking work. In those days Prague looked rather depressing. Sometimes Laffitte would ask me out and give me a splendid lunch: he comes from the Dordogne where people are connoisseurs of pies, goat's-milk cheese and red wine. He started life as a pastrycook, while his wife Georgette could give points to any *cordon bleu*. We did not talk about the struggle for peace or literature, but just ate and drank and enjoyed ourselves.

Once in a while of a Sunday I would go to Dobřiš where Jorge Amado lived in the Writers' Club with his wife and small son. Jorge is a lively, impetuous man, a typical southerner, and his wife Zelia combines gentleness and femininity with true courage. We became great friends. Jorge has known prison, has been exiled twice and has adapted himself to life's adversities. In Dobřiš he spent the whole day writing, and in the evening he played cards with the Czech writer Jan Drda. Amado, lean, volatile and blackhaired, could have passed for a

card-sharper from Odessa or Marseilles, while Drda, heavy and jovial with a touch of slyness, reminded one of Schweik. As they played they swore at one another in Czech and Portuguese: 'Cheat!' 'Swindler!' 'Horsethief!'

Amado is a Communist and for twenty years he did routine political work. He also took part in the peace movement. There is not an ounce of personal ambition in him. He succeeded in bringing several Brazilians of different political views to the congress in Vienna but he himself would not speak: 'Let *them* do it'.

He began writing at an early age and his first novel was published when he was twenty-two. He has an intimate knowledge of life in northern Brazil where he grew up, a land of cocoa plantations and hunger. I like his novels which combine cruel truth with poetry; this is not a literary manner but the essence of the man himself: love of humanity, understanding, kindness. I shall never forget the description in one of his earlier novels of the exodus of starving peasants and the death of the donkey Jeremiah, the family's breadwinner. The donkey knows that the desert grass is poisonous, he nibbles the bark of trees and munches prickly cacti, but finally can hold out no longer, eats some of the poisonous grass and with a mournful cry gives up the ghost.

Amado is better known abroad than in his own country. In 1954 at the airport of Recife, where it was unbearably hot, a freelance photographer was hanging about in the hope of spotting well-known people. Someone advised him to photograph me. 'I took Jorge Amado three times,' he told me, 'and only one paper bought the pictures.' Fame came to Jorge on the publication of his novel *Gabriella*. Flaubert said of Madame Bovary: '*Emma - c'est moi*'. Some people found this rather surprising, for there seemed little in common between the sceptical, ironical bachelor and the light-minded, love-prone provincial lady. But Gabriella is truly Amado; everyone who knows him can recognize the kinship between the generous, spiritually free, compliant yet mutinous woman and her creator.

Few of the friends of my youth remain alive: some have been killed, others have died in their beds. Amado could be my son, but he became a close friend of mine and I know that at the other end of the world there is a man who will never doubt and never forget, and that means a lot.

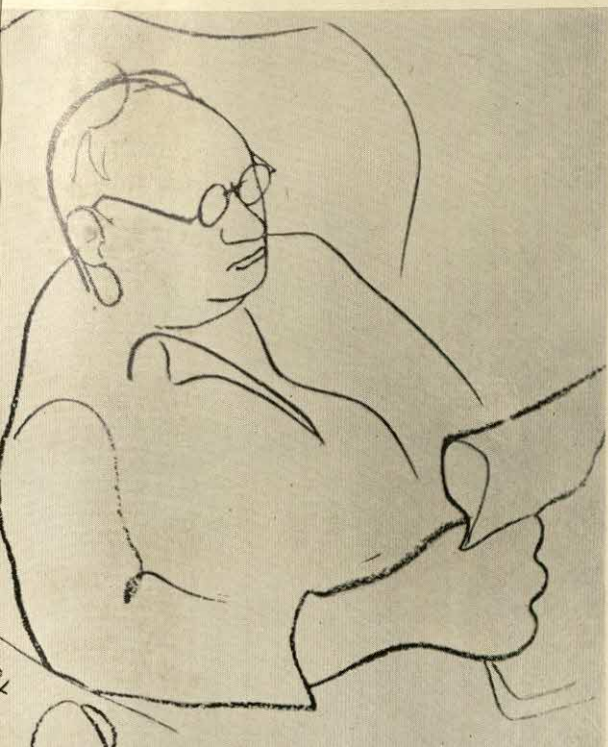
I remember the day in Dobriř when they were celebrating the birth

of Jorge's baby girl; they called her, like Picasso's daughter, Paloma. Nicolás Guillén had been sent a bottle of white rum from Cuba. Pablo Neruda snatched up the bottle and mixed cocktails. Guillén was childishly resentful: he had wanted everyone to taste the Cuban speciality. Guillén is childlike in many ways. He loves applause and medals; for him fame is rather like a Christmas tree, all shining stars and sparkle. He had spent a long time in exile from Cuba and was very homesick. One day I was walking with him along the boulevard St Michel in Paris. He was complaining of loneliness. Suddenly two young girls stopped, stared at us and one of them asked Guillén to autograph a volume of his poems. He immediately became very gay, and as we were parting he said: 'Ah, fancy, I have readers in Paris too!'

His poems are extremely musical. They are closely related to the songs of the Cuban Negroes. He reads them wonderfully well; he can also tap out rhythms on his large, beautifully white teeth with his finger-nail. He joined in the revolutionary struggle a long while ago, although nothing in his own background compelled him to do so. He was a Senator's son, a gifted poet whose first book was praised by the perceptive Unamuno. During the civil war Guillén fought in Spain. Later he had a taste of Batista's jails. He wrote short poems about his beloved country: 'A bird flew in, barely alive, it came with a sad song. Ah, Cuba, I know you! Your palms feed on blood, your blue waters are tears'.

The cold war was now at its most ferocious and this sometimes lent an adventurous slant to our work. The Second Congress was to be held in Sheffield but two months before the date arranged discouraging news reached us from England: according to all the evidence the British government intended to frustrate our plans. We asked the Poles to have premises ready and we booked passages on planes. Then came the well-remembered night: Joliot-Curie with a group of delegates left Paris for London travelling by train and boat. During the night a telephone call from London informed us in Prague that Joliot had been refused entry and turned back. At daybreak we began trying to locate him. There were many ports – where might Joliot be: Calais, Boulogne, le Havre? *Mademoiselle Boulogne* (the telephone operator) was extremely nice; she said she would try to trace Joliot and shortly rang back to say that he was at Dunkirk. *Mademoiselle Dunkirk* proved no less co-operative and connected us with Joliot who was having breakfast in a small dockside café. Farge spoke to him first, then I. It

Maxim Litvinov
and Yakov Suritz



Maxim Litvinov:
from a drawing by
Madame Litvinov



Left: Paul Eluard. Right: Yves Farge

was a curious sort of meeting by telephone. An hour later we sent out an announcement notifying the press that the congress was being transferred to Warsaw.

In those days there were frequent World Council meetings. When Joliot, Farge, Nenni, Donini or Fadeyev was speaking the hall would be packed. There were also some dull sessions. Everyone wanted to have his say, night sittings would be organized, and towards morning the chairman would be struggling not to fall asleep while the speaker was declaring forcefully: 'We shall not relax our vigilance'.

Participation in the peace movement cost some people dear. The Abbé Boulrier and Dom Gaggero were unfrocked, several professors were deprived of their chairs, Isabelle Blume lost her seat in Parliament when the Belgian Socialists expelled her from the Party. She now gives all her time and energy to the fight for peace. There are not many people, even much younger ones, capable of flying off for a few days, as she does, to Mexico, then immediately on to Indonesia, spending a week at a congress, rushing from one committee to another, persuading or pacifying somebody or other, carrying out any job she is asked to do, however unwelcome, only to leave for Japan a fortnight later. Her father was a clergyman, her son is a Communist, and she herself is a fighter.

I had known Pierre Cot for a long time; we first met in Paris during the days of the Popular Front; then later we travelled together to visit the 'Normandie' squadron in Tula; yet I got his true measure only at the time of which I am now speaking. A lawyer, a prominent public figure who had had a seat in the Chamber for decades and had several times held Ministerial office, he struck me as belonging to an entirely different genus, like a fish is to a bird, or a bird to a fish. All the same, I feel at ease with him, perhaps because he has never been a fowler or an angler, because he is interested in art and because he recognizes — political attitudes apart — that even people who share the same views are very dissimilar. We often spent whole nights working out the text of some declaration or recommendation (hardly anyone remembered these texts later, but sometimes we argued for hours on end over an adjective, as though the fate of mankind hung on it). In formal resolutions the words 'taking into account' frequently occur. Pierre Cot is able to take into account everyone's individual peculiarities, a faculty rare among politicians. He is an excellent speaker but he never indulges in what we call oratory: he is precise, logical and aims at convincing his

opponent. He was for many years one of the leaders of the Radical-Socialist Party, the most heterogeneous Party in the world, uniting as it does men of almost every shade of opinion, yet I have seldom met so disciplined a Western politician. When, after arguing the point, he realizes that he cannot win over the other side, he sits down and drafts a resolution expressing the majority's point of view and stating the case of those he has been opposing better than they could have done it themselves.

D'Astier has a very long name: Emmanuel-Raoul d'Astier de la Vigerie. He himself is even longer than his name: on entering a hall I can spot him at once. He has the appearance of a French aristocrat, *ancien régime*, and is also like the traditional pictures of Don Quixote. He has written several good books, half memoirs, half essays; they enjoy some popularity but writers, while praising him, never forget that he is a dilettante. It is even worse when it comes to the politicians for, whether in the Chamber or in the offices of a political newspaper, a Don Quixote is not just a dilettante but a dangerous meddler whom you cannot control. This may be the reason why, during the early days of the peace movement, when people of different opinions came together and when enthusiastic activity alternated with discussions on the meaning of life and organizational work with homespun diplomacy, d'Astier was in his element. He had portraits of his ancestors in his study; by some irony of fate they had all been Ministers of the Interior under various regimes. D'Astier was not spared the hereditary disease: he became Minister of the Interior in the first Free French government. The Germans were still in France and his authority extended only to Corsica. I hardly think he could have been a good Minister, but several years later he proved himself a very good fighter for peace. At every meeting of the bureau or the presidium, at every meeting of the World Peace Council he would say that he was fed up with these senseless discussions and all-night sessions, that we were nothing but dogmatists while he, thank goodness, had not lost the capacity to reason, and that no one would ever see him again in Prague or Vienna. For some reason he used to say this to me as if it was I who had roped him in and would not let him go; he would then retire to his hotel room, read a couple of pages of Montaigne or play a couple of games of patience, and then come back to the session in a calmer state of mind to tackle the draft resolution before the meeting. He is as touchy as a woman, but loyal to his ideas and his friends. He

is not easy to get on with but I value his friendship: whatever one may say, quixotism is in short supply these days.

It is impossible to write about the peace movement as if it were a thing of the past, for it goes on and I take part in it as before. I am recalling the years when it was at its most tumultuous because that was the time when the threat of atomic war was particularly acute. Although the distance between Korea and London or New York is great, the Korean War alarmed the whole world. That unfortunate country was ravaged by fire. Towns and villages were set alight with napalm. At first the North Korean armies occupied practically the whole of Korea, but then the USA stepped in and American troops reached the Chinese frontier. This brought Chinese divisions into the fighting. A number of American politicians and military leaders advised the use of atomic weapons. Some senators clamoured for atom bombs to be dropped on Moscow. Every Frenchman and Italian knew that the Soviet Union had atomic weapons and that *his* house and *his* family might also be destroyed. The struggle for peace was becoming everybody's business.

It is natural that the peace movement should have had its ups and downs. The Stockholm Appeal had been signed by an enormous variety of people: by Thomas Mann and the illiterate natives of Guinea, by Brazilian Ministers and Muslim sheiks, by Henri Matisse and by Quakers. Fired by success, we invited the five Great Powers – the USA, the USSR, China, Great Britain and France – to sign the Appeal and to conclude a mutual peace pact. For ordinary people, however, this was an abstract formula because everyone remembered how many non-aggression pacts Hitler had signed. As for those who understood the international situation, a peace pact seemed utopian: in 1951 it was difficult to imagine Truman and Mao Tse-tung getting together round a table. Besides, signatures are given only once, it is not an annual exercise; there is no point in feeble imitation either in the writing of novels or in social activity. But the demand for the cessation of hostilities, on the other hand, found an echo on all sides.

I sometimes ask myself why I have given up, and still give up, so much time to work which is not demanded of me by my calling or my craft. No one compelled me to take it up, no one coerced me into sticking at it. I took it on of my own accord, but I hardly know how to explain it. When friends asked me whether there would be war, I said no, but this answer was based less on my appraisal of the situation than on wishful thinking. Often, however, as I walked along the streets of this

city or that I felt alarm. In Vienna it once seemed to me that war was stalking at my side and peering into the lighted windows. At times I cursed the stuffy meeting rooms in which endless arguments went on about the third sentence of the seventh paragraph; and there was no one to whom to take my troubles, I had to pull myself together and carry on. The argument was between the job and the man, and it was clear that the job would win.

Looking back, I have no regrets: we were doing *something*, we achieved *something*. Thirty or forty years hence an historian, who today is just learning his letters, may possibly devote a chapter, or perhaps a few lines, to the peace movement. It is not for me to say that he should, for in this matter I am biased and therefore blind.

25

WE CELEBRATED with riotous gaiety the seventy-fifth birthday of the painter Peter Konchalovsky. He sang Spanish songs and danced, which seemed quite out of keeping with the august figure of seventy-five. At the time I myself had just turned sixty and often thought about old age. Nature has her laws; the body wears out and ages, but I have often come across youthful old men and known old people who were full of fun and enterprise and had not lost the impetuosity of their salad days. Konchalovsky belonged to this category; he taught me to read letters from young readers containing the words 'at your advanced age . . .' without a qualm.

My acquaintance with Konchalovsky dated from the twenties but I got to know and like him well only much later. We often met during the war years and after. His feet were firmly planted on the ground, astonishingly so, and that is what I found attractive about him. I have remarked that it is fanatics and the true life-lovers who are best able to stand up to things. The atmosphere of the times was saturated with fanaticism, while genuine enjoyment was lacking.

Konchalovsky was cast in the heroic mould; everything about him was on a large scale: his gestures, his emotions, the sweep of his paint-brush. What I have said about his bubbling gaiety may be misleading: there was nothing of the compulsive joker about him, nor was his cheerfulness of the standardized kind long proclaimed in our country as an exemplary social virtue. It was often said of Konchalovsky that he painted unthinkingly, as the sun shines or as the lilac – which he loved – flowers. But it was not true. He was a man of profound thought, he worked, as he joked, with fine intelligence; and his life had not been all honey, he had also tasted wormwood. His artist's sensibility meant that he could be easily hurt, yet it had proved impossible to crush him, although there were people who would have dearly liked to.

I often talked to him about Paris. Konchalovsky had spent many years there and it was where he had first found himself as a painter. When he was eighteen or nineteen he went to Paris to study art. The

Académie Julian was something like the Moscow Kreimann school: young painters went to it because it had none of the rigid discipline which exasperated everybody at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and where the teachers, as in most other places, were ephemeral celebrities of the academic school. Recalling the Académie Julian, Konchalovsky laughed: 'Do you realize who studied there? Before my time there were Bonnard, Vuillard and Matisse. Gleizes sat next to me; he was still a boy then. Later on Léger and Derain came. Matisse told me that his teacher – I think it was Bouguereau, a celebrity in his day – said to him: "This is the worst thing I have ever seen. You'll never learn to draw. Better take up some other profession"'. I was taught by Laurens, whose paintings hang in the Luxembourg: huge battle-scenes. In this country he would have been awarded at least three Stalin prizes. When he praised me once I was worried, I knew I must be producing rubbish. However, later, when I went to the St Petersburg school, I regretted even Laurens'.

I did not feel that Konchalovsky was much older than myself and sometimes even envied his youthfulness. He once described to me his first contact with modern painting: 'It was Claude Monet's delightful *Haystacks*. There was an exhibition of French technical equipment in Moscow and for some reason they also showed about a hundred pictures among which were Monet's. I was stunned. Wait a minute. I'll tell you when that was . . . 1891'. I smiled to myself: that was the year I was born. Yes, Konchalovsky remained young to the end. When he was close on eighty he sat at his easel from early morning till dusk, and even romped with his grandchildren.

Konchalovsky took a long time to find himself as a painter. He knew the paintings of his father-in-law Surikov, and those of the most prominent artists of his youth, such as Serov and Korovin; he respected them but felt that times had changed and with them the way of looking at things, so he hewed out his own path, or what he liked to call his 'method'. He so deeply admired Van Gogh that he went on a pilgrimage to Arles, excited at the idea of buying paints in the same shop as Van Gogh. There appears to be little in common between tragic, tormented Van Gogh and gay, healthy, sturdy Konchalovsky; yet till the end of his life he liked to quote Van Gogh's words: 'I am getting well acquainted with Nature. I exaggerate, sometimes I make changes in a motif; but for all that, I do not invent the whole picture; on the contrary, I find it all ready in nature, only it must be disentangled'.

The next discovery, and for him the most important, was Cézanne's work. Konchalovsky was so enormously impressed that he set about doing something he had never done before nor ever did again: he translated a book into Russian: Emile Bernard's record of Cézanne's observations on painting.

Konchalovsky was thirty-four when at the first 'Jack of Diamonds' exhibition his pictures won the approval of some and excited the derision of others.

I looked into a volume of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* published in 1951 and found the following lines devoted to the 'Jack of Diamonds' group: 'A typical manifestation of the extreme decadence of bourgeois art in the epoch of imperialism. With their hostile attitude to ideological content and realism, and their defection from the lofty artistic traditions of the past (hence the crude provocative name of the association), the Jack of Diamonds group masked their reactionary attitude by demands for a "new" form. However, their cosmopolitan "innovations" boiled down to imitations of P. Cézanne and H. Matisse'.

I recall Konchalovsky's paintings of the 'Jack of Diamonds' period: still-lives, a bridge across the Nara, a portrait of the painter Yakulov, and I wonder: what has the 'epoch of imperialism' got to do with it? (It may be remarked here that French imperialists derived little inspiration from Matisse's painting and that Matisse hated French imperialism.) The painters who belonged to the 'Jack of Diamonds' group – Konchalovsky, Lentulov, Mashkov, Rozhdestvensky, Kuprin, Falk – did not leave the country after the Revolution, for they loved the Russian people and served it. Official Russia greeted the first exhibition of the group with jeers and hoots; the people who took a favourable view of it included Lunacharsky and the young Mayakovsky. Of course the name 'Jack of Diamonds' is rather meaningless, but in those days silly names were in fashion. (*Les Fauves* does not sound very sensible either, but this did not prevent Matisse, Marquet, Dufy and Friesz from becoming great masters and, by joining forces, giving new life to the art of their time.)

I have described the occasion when, on returning to Moscow after the Revolution, I went to an exhibition of pictures by the 'Jack of Diamonds' group and was overjoyed. In Paris I knew about contemporary Russian painting only from articles in *Utro Rossii* (Russia's Morning) and *Russkoye Slovo* (Russian Word) and had rather thought

that the 'Jack of Diamonds' painters were imitating the French. I saw at once this was nonsense.

Of course Konchalovsky, like all the other members of the group, had learnt a lot from Cézanne, but can any twentieth-century artist be unaffected by the discoveries of that master? Picasso has given amazing expression to the Spanish genius, yet he could hardly have done so had there been no Cézanne before him. Andrey Rublev was the first to show the lyricism, the limpidity and the depth of the Russian character in painting, yet he had studied under the Byzantine Theophanes the Greek. Konchalovsky, Lentulov and Mashkov learnt not only from Cézanne but from the masters of Russian folk art. How well I remember the painted signboards in our pre-revolutionary towns: a barber lathering a customer's cheeks, a Turk smoking his pipe, sliced water-melons surrounded by bunches of grapes. Konchalovsky used to recall that he had painted his 1912 still-life *Loaves* after seeing a signboard with sugar-loaves. He also said that when he started painting a bull-fight after a trip to Spain he had in mind the old Troitsky toys.

Konchalovsky revered Cézanne and loved French painting but his own work was essentially Russian. When he had an exhibition in Paris some of the critics spoke of the 'coarseness' and 'primitiveness' of his pictures; they did not realize they were looking at the manifestation of a different national character, a different nature, different traditions.

Konchalovsky often spoke with admiration of the realism of the great French masters; this may seem a little surprising, for the people who for years on end hounded him with adverse criticism did so in the name of Realism. Konchalovsky divided painting into the realistic – close to nature – and the illusory – not organically bound up with nature, for which 'photography often serves as an aid'. He recalled how some art patrons had come to see his still-life *Loaves* in 1912: 'For fun I hung up a real *kalach*¹ by a thread, the same colour as the background, and they looked for a long time without noticing that one *kalach* was real until I gave it a push and set it swinging on its thread. This proved the closeness to reality'. It should be added that the upholders of illusory realism took this still-life of the 'Jack of Diamonds' period (naturally without the hanging *kalach*) as the embodiment of 'anti-Realism'.

¹ A small loaf shaped like a padlock.

Konchalovsky is said to have had an exceptionally happy life; that is only partially true. He was wonderfully robust, healthy and high-spirited; he travelled a lot and worked hard – he painted seventeen hundred pictures in all – he took an interest in everything, spoke fluent French, Italian and Spanish and learnt English so that he could read Shakespeare in the original. He lived in Bugry, with a garden full of lilac trees and a house full of guests – he liked to keep open house; he and his wife Olga were an ideal couple; he adored his children and grandchildren; he went shooting, read Descartes and counted among his friends such great artists as Alexey Tolstoy, Sergey Prokofiev, Picasso and Meyerhold; he died at the age of eighty and was active almost to the end; he loved his country and watched it grow up and mature spiritually. Described in this way Konchalovsky's life does indeed seem almost ideally happy. Everything in this idyll is true, and yet it is more illusory than real.

Life for Konchalovsky meant first and foremost art; he said so again and again. When he went to Paris in 1925 and sold several of his pictures he bought seventy kilograms of paints: he could not imagine a single day without palette and brushes. At night when he could not paint he drew. That is why the most important part of his life is his work, his work as an artist.

Even in this respect Konchalovsky was lucky: it is enough to think of the hard experience of such people as Lentulov, Falk, Tatlin, Drevin and Udaltsova. Konchalovsky became a member of the Academy of Arts and from time to time had one-man shows. Yes, it is all true, but only in part.

How a painter or a writer is treated is bound to influence him; a man has to be fanatically hard-headed to remain impervious to kicks or plaudits, the pillory or prizes. I know from personal experience that sometimes one hardly realizes that one has given in at some point or surrendered something at another. There were periods when Konchalovsky confessed: 'I'm working, but not with the same satisfaction I used to feel'.

He had a profound understanding of painting. The distance that separated him from Picasso could hardly have been greater, yet he used to say 'Picasso surpasses them all', and could explain to others with deep insight why Picasso was the great Realist of our time.

An extract from Konchalovsky's notebook reads: 'In a letter to his brother, Lev Sergeyevich, Pushkin wrote: "There is a heresy here.

They say that verses are not the most important part of poetry. Then what is? Prose? This should be extirpated by persecution, by the knout, by bludgeons, by songs to the tune of 'Alone I sit in the company'." We, too, have a heresy. They say that painting is not the most important part in painting. Then what is? That is why I am always being told that my main defect is painting, an enthusiasm for painting, although at the same time the critic would point to the affirmation of life and the qualities bound up with this affirmation. Is this not heresy? The most important part of painting is the painting, because only then can an idea, a thought, a subject make an impact on the beholder. It is only through his painting that an artist can communicate his thoughts and emotions to the beholder. That is the nature of painting'.

Inspiration often liberated Konchalovsky from the 'illusory likeness' (as he called it) which was alien to him. This is evident in his portrait of Meyerhold, in certain family portraits he did, in many still-lives and in the amazingly vigorous *Polotyor* (The Floor-polisher) which he painted in 1946. He has left many excellent pictures, and yet when I recall the fate of this important painter I invariably think of the 'heretics' whom he castigated.

His was a wonderful nature; he very seldom complained and he maintained tolerable, if not good, relations even with those who thwarted his work. His wife was far more outspoken about her husband's attackers and used to say: 'I'm a Siberian; where one ought to use a chisel, I go at it with an axe'.

I remember a large retrospective exhibition where Konchalovsky stood, jovial as usual, shaking hands with everyone and smiling. He took me aside and, referring to one of the leading lights in the Artists' Union of the time, said: 'He went abroad, you know. He came rushing back and ordered my best pictures to be taken out of the show: the *Polotyor*, the *Buffalo* and the earlier Spanish paintings. And now he's going to make a speech and congratulate me'. Konchalovsky went on smiling as he spoke but I realized what this smile cost him.

In 1949 I was in Tambov. A girl on the staff of the local museum described the vicissitudes of a Konchalovsky still-life which hung in the canteen of one of the larger factories in the region. The director had decided that it was 'devoid of ideology', that lilac was not worthy of the leading workers in production. A huge canvas depicting a scene from factory life was put in its place. The workers rose up in protest and demanded their lilac back.

On my return to Moscow I told this story to Konchalovsky and suddenly I saw there were tears in his eyes. 'Ah,' he said in a low voice, 'that is an award indeed.'

One may as well put a full stop here. History will be the judge.

26

IN 1951 I reached the age of sixty. A celebration meeting was held that evening in the hall of the Writers' Club where authors were criticized, honoured and their funeral orations delivered. The memories it evoked were plentiful.

Fadeyev took the chair and Fedin made a speech. Representatives of publishing houses, journals, newspapers and theatres read congratulatory addresses, all very much alike: 'a passionate tribune', 'a well-sharpened pen', 'a tireless fighter for peace', 'books that have become part of the treasury of Soviet literature'. The gallery was crowded with young people. It was very hot and the artificial leather folders that piled up in front of me exuded an unpleasant smell. Then telegrams from the World Peace Council, from Tuwim, Nezval, Neruda and Amado were read out. In my brief reply I followed up the customary expressions of gratitude by saying what I felt most deeply: 'Like every other writer I have known moments of uncertainty, of doubt and of silence. I have been sustained by Russian literature, by our great and profoundly human predecessors. One may not write as well as they did – talent is not apportioned equally – but one ought to think, feel, suffer and rejoice no worse than they did . . . I recall Belinsky's admirable words about the poet: "To him belongs by right the justification of man's noble nature, just as to him belongs by right the denunciation of the false and unreasonable foundations of society which distort man". To struggle against those false foundations of which Belinsky speaks, in the name of human dignity, is the writer's duty, that is what he is destined to do. He does not compile a report, or make a literary paraphrase of events, he does not draw up an inventory of what exists in the world, he discloses the treasures of the human heart . . . To me, as to many of my contemporaries, the continuity and universality of human culture were not revealed in a flash. We often read history one chapter at a time, without relating the chapters to each other, and geography often hampers us from taking a closer look at history. Meanwhile the relay torch race continues and the fire of Prometheus is handed on . . . A man ages, he tires more easily, his pulses do not

quicken so often. But for the writer there is no such thing as old age: he is animated by undisclosed passions and unwritten books, he remains young until the moment when he is at last snatched away, forever, from his sheet of paper, not by men this time, but by death. I say this because I still feel the urge to write'.

The secretariat of the Writers' Union decided to mark the occasion by publishing five volumes of my works. This publication caused me no end of trouble: almost every page of my works – which had already appeared in many editions – was scrutinized. It might contain something prohibited. I happen to have kept the copy of a letter I sent to a high official in January 1953 asking for protection from this indignity. Besides various alterations in the text I was pressed to change certain surnames in the two short novels *The Second Day* and *Without Taking Breath*: 'In both these books written about the Russian people who, together with the peoples of other nationalities, are building factories and transforming the North, there are far too many surnames indicating non-indigenous peoples'. There followed a list of seventeen surnames (out of two hundred and seventy-six) in *The Second Day* and nine surnames (out of a hundred and seventy four) in *Without Taking Breath*. I could not help thinking: and what about the surname on the title-page?

With the royalties from this publication we bought a log house in the country co-operative NIL which stands for *Nauka, Iskustvo, Literatura* (Science, Art, Literature). This part of the countryside is unlike that surrounding Moscow: my little house stands on a small steep hill, below it flows the Malaya Istra. This is no more than a brook, but in April, when the snows thaw, it swells to such proportions that with a little imagination one might almost call it the Nile¹, the more so as our railway stop is called New Jerusalem. The Muscovites used to refer to this Zvenigorod region as 'the Moscow Switzerland'. The village takes its name from the New Jerusalem monastery built in the seventeenth century on the orders of the Patriarch Nikon. Before they retreated the Germans blew up the belfry and badly damaged the cathedral; in 1950 coloured glazed tiles, a blend of Florence and Persia, still lay strewn about. Chekhov lived in the small town of Voznesensk (now Istra) where he worked in the local hospital, wrote his stories and rested under the old monastery trees. I

¹ In Russian *Nil*.

planted lilac, jasmine and roses. During the winter I had a telephone call from the Istra Town Council to say: 'Your *dacha* has been burnt down'.

With the money I had for the next volumes we started building a new house on the old brick foundations which had resisted the fire. There were too many visitors and not enough peace in our small Moscow flat, so that since 1952 we have spent the greater part of our time in New Jerusalem. The young lime-trees which I got from Professor V. P. Timofeyev at the Timiryazev tree-nursery, have now matured. I have been writing this book sitting at the window: in winter everything is white, while in August the flowers of the short northern summer are ablaze with brilliant colour.

I was being absolutely truthful when I said at my birthday celebration that I felt the urge to write. I wanted to set down what I had seen and felt, to write about grief, about doubts, about hope. The end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties were perhaps the most difficult time for our literature and for the whole Soviet people. Men went on working hard, restoring the destroyed towns, building factories and digging canals. Never could a spiritually weak or desperate people have done what our people did after the war. Conditions were daunting. Moscow and Leningrad seemed a paradise to the inhabitants of Saratov, but in Engels people spoke with envy of the Saratov shops. However, when I say that times were daunting, it is not so much the material hardships that I have in mind. The men who had slogged all the way from the Volga to the Spree could not in their hearts reconcile themselves to obtuse bureaucracy, to the huge imaginary figures of published statistics, to the familiar words 'better not do it'. To an onlooker it seemed that initiative, creative thought and human relations were icebound, but under this ice flowed the living water of deep feelings, unuttered words, of conscience and awareness. It was about this river that I wanted to write. Instead, I toiled away at my novel about an American senator, about the intrigues of the newspaper agency 'Transoc', about the old age of Professor Dumas, about the stupid tailor MacHorne who sang:

'You've got your wires crossed, said she,
That kiss was never meant for me'.

I have said that in 1917 and 1918 I wrote poor verse. But at that time I was not yet thirty. *The Ninth Wave* was written by a man of sixty. I could, of course, point to some of my comrades who in those

years wrote inferior books, but a writer is answerable first of all to himself. I regret writing *The Ninth Wave*, not because some historical events are inaccurately described, for I assessed them according to the data available to me at the time, and anyhow these are mere details; that is not what matters. Since the twenties reviewers have criticized me for cramming my novels with journalism. They did not convert me: I was trying to give a new form to the novel; I felt I could not separate the destiny of man from the events which filled the pages of the daily papers. I have never called upon others to follow my example: writers, like everyone else, differ from each other. I am one of those writers who feel themselves closely tied to what we sometimes angrily call 'current events' and which sometimes, ten years later, become a chapter of history. *Julio Jurenito*, *The Second Day*, *The Fall of Paris*, *The Storm* were born out of happenings which in their time might have been called 'current events'. An author is no judge of his own books; in what he has written he often sees what he wanted to write, and if, perhaps, the books I have listed are poor, at least they were the outcome of an inner necessity. I ask myself why I started on *The Ninth Wave* in 1951. It was certainly not for the sake of the money, but this hardly explains it. While the war was on, the idea of writing a novel about it never entered my head. I knew that it was impossible. In 1950 the cold war was being bitterly waged, one could only glorify or curse it, exacerbate or try to abate it, but to understand the meaning of what was happening, to look into the heart of the enemy was something no one was able to do. The articles I wrote at the time may have been good or bad, fair or unfair, but I do not repudiate them. To write a novel, however, and an immensely long one into the bargain, was foolish. I dimly realized this, but what drew me on was the wish to show the temper of our people. I comforted myself with the hope that I should be able to tell at least some part of the truth.

I remember discussing one day with Savich, who had read the finished chapters, how a writer should treat Soviet characters. With both laughter and bitterness we said that if the teachers have calumniated and ruined Somov, a woman colleague must obtain redress from the Regional Party Secretary. If Osip has come up against cruel reality in Kiev, he must immediately be spiritually rescued by his comrades in arms. If Valya realizes at last that she has no talent and if the plays produced in the theatre where she acts are dull and lifeless and she has fallen into despair, in the nick of time some unknown admirer in

the audience must warmly thank her. If the director of the factory is a bureaucrat and does not want to put a threshing-machine invented by a young engineer into production, Moscow must give its approval to the inventor. If natural disasters occur, people must quickly overcome them, and if a man falls into despondency his mood is lightened by a loving wife, or an observant friend.

The action of my novel takes place in ten countries; less than a quarter of the text is devoted to Soviet people and these chapters are sugar-coated. Minayev, one of the characters in *The Storm* carried over into *The Ninth Wave*, plans to write a truthful novel about the war; in the book there are extracts from the notes he has made for this purpose, for instance: "Our love is very austere," said Vera. "If we get killed it doesn't matter, but if we get through alive, we'll have to invent something." Other notes deal with work, comradeship and life in general. However, in 1954 Minayev could not have written the book he had in mind. And what I wrote was a bad novel.

In the spring of 1951 I had a meeting with the students of the Institute of Literature. I told them how I saw the nature of creative work. (*Literaturnaya Gazeta* published a slightly watered down version of my talk.) I reminded my listeners of the advice Leo Tolstoy gave to the budding author Leonid Andreyev: if a writer has been planning a book but does not feel the need to write it, then he should not write it at all. These words are a stern condemnation of *The Ninth Wave*, for I had no need to write it.

In January 1953 Fadeyev, who was in hospital, sent me a long letter about *The Ninth Wave*; he had some critical remarks to make but said that on the whole it was 'powerful and humanitarian', and that there was 'a mighty surge of popular forces, a human deluge' in it. At the same time Aragon set *The Ninth Wave* on a par with *The Fall of Paris* and *The Storm*. All the same, I did not believe these generous opinions because I was perfectly certain that I had committed one of the worst errors open to a writer. I have just picked up the book, turned over its pages and I felt like humming the song of the American tailor: 'You've got your wires crossed . . .'

Not so long ago I looked through the files of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* for the years 1951-2. The leaders invariably stressed 'the unrivalled flowering of creative work'. There were galaxies of photographs of literary prizewinners; but there was no foretelling who would be the next to come a cropper. For a whole month it was the Ukrainian

writers who were taken to task: Korneichuk and Wanda Wassilewska had sinned by writing the libretto for an opera; Sosura had published a poem of which someone disapproved; it was recalled that in 1945 Rylsky had written 'noxious verses'; Pervomaysky was criticized again: this time it appeared that he was both a 'cosmopolitan' and a 'bourgeois nationalist'. Another issue was devoted to the critic Gurvich who had written a review of the novel *Far from Moscow*. Fadeyev and Surkov admitted that they had recommended the publication of the review which *Pravda* described as 'lapsing into unpatriotic views'. The editor of *Novy Mir* 'fully realized his mistake'. Some of the articles read like records of legal proceedings, though today it is difficult to understand of what the crimes consisted.

Literaturnaya Gazeta contained a number of obituaries: Vishnevsky, Platonov and Pavlenko had died. Later came the jubilees: of Victor Hugo and of Gogol.

Gogol's admirable monument was transferred from the boulevard first to the Donskoy monastery and then into the courtyard of the house where he had lived: this was because the bronze Gogol sat plunged in melancholy whereas a writer is supposed to be permanently cheerful.

Of course, even in those lean years there were some pleasures for the reading public: Vassily Grossman wrote a novel about the war which had some excellent chapters; Vera Panova published extracts from her new book *Seasons of the Year*, in which, for the first time in literature, I encountered our youngsters of the post-war years. I read Ovechkin's *Rayonniye Budni* (Everyday Life in a Country Town), and a short novel by the young Granin. Certainly I am leaving out a lot, but it is difficult to remember when a particular book reached me.

In those days Martynov often came to see me. He spoke little, I would even say he was tongue-tied and seemed blind to his surroundings. At times he did not appear to notice other people. I once introduced him to Pablo Neruda. Martynov was deeply impressed by the Chilean poet in rather the same way that natural phenomena – rainstorms, drought, the thawing of snow, and wind – always gripped his imagination. He wrote a poem about Neruda describing him much as the newspapers did: a mighty paladin, a legendary bard. But Neruda understood Martynov: 'He's a true poet, he sees another world before his eyes, the world of art'. After 1946 Martynov's poetry was no longer published. He went on writing; he would pull crumpled scraps of

paper out of his pocket and read them aloud to me, and each time I was struck by his poetical power: meteorology had been turned into an epic. He himself would drink tea absentmindedly and answer questions in a distracted manner. Those were the years when he attained his zenith as a poet. In 1955 he reached the age of fifty. On the insistence of the younger poets a literary reception was given in his honour at the Writers' Club at which they recited his poems. I seemed to be the only one of the older writers present. Afterwards there were speeches by representatives of literary groups from Moscow factories and by railwaymen. They all said that Martynov's poems, which reached them in hand-written copies, had helped them to understand modern poetry. The poet's luck changed: a few months later his book was published.

Younger men – Vinokurov, Mezhirov and Urin – also read their poems to me. I wrote about Vinokurov in *Smena* (The Relay); he was extremely young at the time but his unpretentious verses contained some good, intelligent lines.

Mandel, a student at the Institute of Literature, who, after many tribulations, became the poet Korzhavin, used to visit me. He was very muddleheaded, at times unpredictable; he argued with his teachers and wrote poetry for himself and his friends. The manuscript of some of his verses fell into the wrong hands. Mandel was sent for. Fortunately for him the official who dealt with him was a decent person who merely advised him not to write any more silly verse. Shortly after, however, Mandel was arrested, but he was in luck here too: he was exiled to a remote Siberian village for three years and nothing worse. His father, a bookbinder, and his mother, a doctor, sent him money. The poet read, thought and wrote. When I met him again he had matured; he told me that he had gone to Karaganda of his own accord without waiting to be directed and was studying at the Mining Technical Institute; he went on writing poetry but did not want to be at the mercy of the literary taste of editorial boards; he read me the introduction to a poem in which he said that no epoch was easy and that everything depended on the man himself. The other day he sent me his first book of verse.

A conference of young writers was organized in Moscow and I was asked to take part in one of the seminars. I read a dozen manuscripts: short stories and novels. There was some good stuff in almost all of them but one could feel the constraint. Talking to the young prose-writers I realized that they knew life and understood people, but as one

of them admitted: 'I know it's not good, but what can one do? It's difficult to write a novel without the hope of getting it published.'

I felt drawn towards the new generation. For two years I was in charge of the literary group at the Timiryazev Academy. Almost all its members wrote poetry. I did not expect to make poets of them, a thing which I believe to be impossible. But one can teach people to read poetry and raise their aesthetic standards, and this I tried to do. I found it interesting to talk to the twenty-year-olds, most of whom were the children of collective farmers or regional agronomists. One day a young student who was walking home with me asked: 'Why don't the journals publish poems about love? We read Pushkin, Lermontov, Blok, Yessenin and Pasternak. But who's writing like that today?' At the end of our talk he said: 'By the time I leave the Academy I may or may not have learnt to write poetry, but I shall certainly always read it. I dare say that in five years' time they'll publish poems about love too'. A year later this boy, Volodya Kokliayev, was drowned in a pond.

In 1950 the poet Boris Slutsky came to see me. I had met him on the eve of the war but had not come across him since. When I started writing *The Storm* someone brought me a thick manuscript: the notes of an officer who had been in the fighting. Among interesting observations, tersely and often skilfully expressed, I discovered a poem about the fate of Soviet prisoners of war entitled *The Pit of Cologne*. I decided that this was a bit of folklore and used it in my novel. But it turned out that Slutsky had been the author. He read a poem to me about the horses on a troopship sunk by a mine: 'The horses went to the bottom and neighed, and neighed, until all of them had sunk to the bottom. That is all. I cannot help it, I am sorry for the roan ones that did not reach the land'. I felt an immediate affinity with Slutsky's poetry. Later I tried to define the nature of this poetry, its sources in popular speech and feeling, and compared him with Nekrassov. My article earned me abuse, but perhaps I had not succeeded in conveying my ideas. Slutsky never wrote about love for a woman nor about nature: his Muse was a signals corps girl at the front, or she ploughed with a cow, or carried stones on a building site. Shortly after Stalin's death he recited to me: 'The time for circuses is over, it is now the time for bread, a break for smoking has been granted to all those who were storming heaven'. I could never have believed that I should be able to talk to a man thirty years my junior as easily as to a contemporary, yet it turned out to be

quite possible. What helped, no doubt, was the fact that we had become friends before the 'break for smoking'.

Other people's poetry put heart into me – poetry lived (in some cases, as in the far past, by word of mouth). And the invisible river of which I spoke earlier flowed even more broadly in life itself.

At the beginning of 1950 I was elected deputy to the Soviet of Nationalities by one of the Riga districts. The speeches at the pre-election meetings were in Latvian; girls offered me flowers – white arum lilies that looked as if they were made of fabric – and gave little curtsies. My constituents rarely consulted me, for as they lived in the capital of their Republic they took their demands and complaints to the local councillors. A year later I was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR by the town of Engels and its adjoining districts. It was then that I realized that a deputy's job is no sinecure.

Before the war Engels had been the capital of the Autonomous Republic of the Volga Germans. Now the town and the surrounding villages were almost exclusively populated by new settlers. The people had not yet had time to adapt themselves to conditions which were unfamiliar to them: the Ukrainians froze in winter, the Russians cursed the parching winds. I have already said that in those years the whole country, with the exception of the industrial centres and certain regions with highly profitable crops had to tighten its belt. Saratov was better off than Engels, but it was difficult to reach by train: in winter the road went across the frozen Volga, in summer small steamers plied the river, but in spring and autumn the inhabitants of Engels could only gaze hungrily at the lights of Saratov. The local authorities asked me to try to have Engels upgraded to a higher supply category. I tried, but in vain. However, I was at least able to get some ambulances: the Minister received me, perhaps out of curiosity, for after all I was a writer; he talked about literature, but I was firmly resolved not to leave until I had got the ambulances. Engels is a long, straggling town, with no pavements in some places and bad street lighting. I helped to get buses. All this meant doing the rounds of various ministries, long negotiations and much patience. I also rendered some little service to the library: it contained many rare German books but few Russian ones. I arranged for an exchange of books, which was no simple matter, for as well as permits from various centres the signatures of rather inaccessible personages were needed.

Happy people do not go to doctors or deputies. On Sundays hun-

dreds of people would enter their names on the list of those who wanted to see me: one man pleaded that he and his family could not go on living in eight square metres; another protested that his father had been wrongfully sentenced; a third complained that he was refused work in his particular trade. I succeeded in getting the prosecutor to revise one case (dozens of other applications lay unheeded), obtained an artificial limb for a disabled ex-serviceman, bought a certain drug in Stockholm for a woman who said it saved her small boy's life, and managed to get hold of books and seeds. These were 'small deeds', but they made me happier for an hour or so, and I felt in close touch with the day-to-day life of thousands of people.

My office was in the Town Hall and those who came to see me spoke in whispers, often asking me not to name the people they complained of: 'You'll go away and then they'll make me pay for it'. A few years later things changed. I became the deputy for Daugavpils (in Russian Dvinsk), a town destroyed during the war, where people of many nationalities were living in wretched conditions, where thousands of housewives longed for paid jobs outside the home, where a Pedagogical Institute had been built with a far too magnificent staircase but no living accommodation for the teaching staff. There, when the citizens came to see me, they spoke without any reservation and in loud voices. But that was in 1955, and I am now talking of 1952.

I travelled in the steppes east of the Volga; I was overwhelmed by demands and complaints in the villages. At one collective farm they said that artesian wells had been sunk and they had given the money for them, but there was no water; at another the complaint was that no building material was obtainable and that the school was housed in a cottage in which people were living; in a third the younger people were up in arms: 'We were told by Engels that they would be sending us a theatrical company, but only three actors came; they just performed bits out of a play, and the play itself was deadly dull – all about a group leader who knows the best way to sow and a chairman who objects. We know enough about that ourselves. What we want is some real theatre'. One of them added: 'I wish they'd bring *Hamlet*. I saw it in Saratov. What dialectics! It kept me thinking for a whole month'.

At one collective farm they asked me to stay for dinner, giving me fried eggs and home-brewed beer. The chairman of the farm, a woman, said: 'Now you must help to settle the point, we've been arguing with

her for a month'. 'She', who turned out to be the accountant, enlightened me on the point: 'I think Sergey was right in not taking Mado to Moscow. I came here from Gzhatsk. One would think there was nothing to it – it's the same country, the same language, and yet I can't get used to it. In the night, when I think of my house – the Germans burnt it down – I cry like an idiot. If you were to set a Frenchwoman down here she'd have no one to talk to, she'd just pine away'. The chairman, an energetic, masterful-looking woman said quite irrelevantly: 'A human being must have dreams. Sometimes you wake up, you've dreamt about something nice and you feel cross: why can't you take your dream with you? It would make even working in the fields easier'.

The spiritual awareness of the people was growing. In the steppe schoolchildren recited. 'But he, the restless, seeks the storm . . .'¹ They grew up with hopes of the future. Today they have all reached the age of twenty, and watching our youth – our thinking, demanding, sometimes rowdy youth – I recall the fair-haired first-form pupil who recited Lermontov. Seventh-form girls made trips to Saratov, where they went to the museum and reflected on Chernyshevsky's fate. One of them told me: 'I met a girl in Saratov who let me copy out some verses by Yessenin. How sad about the little colt'.

One day in Engels a man of about fifty came to see me. He had spent the whole of that Sunday in the waiting-room till his turn came. I asked him to sit down but he remained standing and shouted: 'Can you believe it, only fifteen for a town like Engels!' I was already quite bemused by dealing with a hundred visitors, and kept automatically asking 'fifteen of what?' wondering whether it was beds in one of the hospitals, or shopping centres. At last I got him to explain. It seemed that in connection with the 150th anniversary of Victor Hugo's birth the State Publishing House had announced the issue of the complete works on subscription. The great French writer was not distinguished by terseness of style, he had lived a long life and written a great deal. Who in Engels would want to have his complete works? Besides, there would not be enough space for them in one room. But my visitor was seething with indignation: 'People came crowding to the place the evening before and, what do you think, only fifteen subscriptions had been allocated to the whole town'. I felt pleased that I could immedi-

¹ From Lermontov's *Lone White Sail*.

ately satisfy the demand of at least one of my constituents: as a member of the jubilee committee I was entitled to a subscription and would send him the books. But he shook his head: 'I don't need them, I was third in the queue and got my subscription. What I'm talking about is the town as a whole. It's a crying shame: Engels is a large town, but all it gets is fifteen'.

On another occasion it was a young worker who came. His face still had a boy's chubbiness, he was shy and explained rather incoherently that he had been sent to do some repairs in an old people's home, and in his presence one old woman was telling the others that some special glasses had been prescribed for her, and that she had been told 'you can get along without glasses', and this to a woman who had worked as a teacher for forty-two years: 'Just think, Comrade Writer, she opened the eyes of so many and now she can't see to read. I think it's an absolute disgrace'. He was holding a book in his hand, and I asked him what he was reading. This made him shyer than ever: 'I knew I'd have to wait a long time before I could see you'. It turned out to be an algebra textbook.

No, it was not in vain that the teacher had worked forty-two years; the efforts of pedagogues, librarians, museum curators, actors, lecturers and writers were not in vain. The people were thinking, learning, maturing. The small provincial town, the huts, the villages buried in snow, the lopsided little houses – all this seemed neglected and sleepy, yet life was bubbling over; and the rosy pictures favoured by *Literaturnaya Gazeta* actually robbed it of much of its virtue, for although in reality the people lived worse than the characters in plays which were awarded prizes of all three grades, they were also in reality stronger and spiritually richer than those characters.

I became a passionate gardener. I planted two horse-chestnuts, one died but the other has grown and now blossoms in the spring just as if it were in Kiev or Paris. I sowed a great deal; it is an excellent occupation: there is nothing certain about a book, but you sow the tiniest seeds, cover the box with a sheet of glass and a fortnight later small green dots appear; then you have to prick them out, a job requiring accuracy and precision – and one that is very soothing because you cannot think at the same time about your latest worries – you have to exert great care to protect the seedlings from diseases and parasites, and then you can be certain they will flower in due course.

The reader may wonder why I have suddenly switched from the

people of Engels to the preoccupations of an elderly amateur gardener. It is not by accident. Many people abroad, and also some of our youngsters, do not understand that the life of the people went on, that nothing could interrupt it. The people lived through a great deal that was evil yet remained on the alert, feeling, building. A Moscow garden looks dead in winter, but in the tree trunks and in the roots invisible processes are going on in preparation for the spring flowering. It is easy enough to realize this afterwards but in 1951 I was often driven to despair.

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IN 1950 a Stalin Peace Prize committee was set up composed of Aragon, Kuo Mo-jo, Andersen Nexö, Bernal, Dembowski, Sado-veanu, Neruda, Fadeyev and myself, with Skobeltsyn as chairman.

Among the first year's prize-winners, who included Joliot-Curie, was Soong Ching Ling, Sun Yat-sen's widow. In September 1951 Pablo Neruda and I, accompanied by our wives, went to China to present this prize. We travelled by rail as far as Irkutsk, as Neruda was very keen to see something of Siberia if only from a train window, and, on arrival, had a meeting with a number of writers. All his life, Neruda said, he had wanted to see Lake Baikal. We were taken round the ichthyological centre where we were shown strange deep-water fish which Neruda insisted on tasting. Happily it is not always easy to distinguish between one fish and another when they are fried, but I am pretty certain that what Neruda ate with such relish was not one of the rare specimens we had seen swimming about in the aquarium.

Although it contravenes the rule I have tried to impose upon myself, I should like to say something about Pablo Neruda and my experiences associated with him. Except for Picasso, all the people to whom I have devoted chapters in these memoirs are no longer among the living, for I have wanted to avoid inadvertently hurting or causing unpleasantness for anyone. But Neruda has become a legendary figure in his lifetime and quite a few stirring books have already been written about him. The Neruda that I want to present, however, is not the one who figures on the stage of history but the man I knew in ordinary surroundings – in Madrid, Paris, Prague, Moscow, Peking, Vienna, Santiago and Isla Negra.

In many ways this last volume of my memoirs is sad: old age, as the Russians say, is no joy, and the years of which I write – from 1945 to 1953 – nobody could call gay ones. But in recalling the days spent with Neruda, when I shall have less to say about his remarkable poetry than about his eccentricities, I am able to smile and may perhaps raise a smile in the reader.

I met him first in Madrid in 1936. That period is generally regarded

as a turning point in the poet's life and work. Personally I believe that 'turning points' are rare. Neruda was then thirty-two and his character was fully formed. He had begun writing poetry early and already in *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* he showed not only considerable mastery but also that he had found himself. In one of these poems he wrote: '... Like white handkerchiefs of farewell the clouds move away / the wind shakes them in its traveller's hands. / Immeasurable heart of the wind / beating above our lovers' silence'.

Thirty years later he was still writing about love, the wind and partings. In 1936 his work took on a new breadth. He was the Chilean consul to Madrid and saw much of his friends García Lorca, Rafael Alberti and Miguel Hernández. Then fascist bombs started raining on the city: 'And through the streets the blood of children flowed. / Simply, like the blood of children'. It was then that he published his book of poems *Spain in the Heart*. I translated it into Russian. We became friends but soon after that parted, not to meet again for ten years.

During the war Neruda was the Chilean consul to Mexico. I read his *Songs to Stalingrad*. Later I was sent a collection of my war articles which had been published in Mexico with an introduction by Neruda in which he denounced the aesthetes and extolled the Soviet Union. At about this time he became a Communist. On his return to Chile he wrote verse and addressed public meetings: workers in Santiago and Valparaiso, who had never read any poetry, grew to know Neruda.

The presidential elections were about to be held. Gonzalez Videla, who promised agrarian reform and the protection of workers' rights, was the candidate supported by the Communists and Neruda canvassed for him. Once elected, the new President quickly forgot his promises. It was now that Neruda's epic – probably well known to most people – began. He was accused of high treason and then, early in 1948, he appeared in the Senate and publicly charged the President of the Republic with treason. The poet had to go into hiding, though he worked on his book *Canto general*. I have already related how he contrived to come to the Paris peace congress.

Neruda has always had a high regard for Walt Whitman, not only because he has learnt a great deal from him but also because he feels they have an affinity as poets of the same continent. Even on so universal a theme as peace Neruda writes unlike a European poet: 'Peace for the coming twilights, / peace for the bridge, peace for the wine, /

peace for the words that search for me / and that rise in my blood
entwining / the old song with earth and with loves, / peace for the
town in the morning / when the bread awakens ... / peace for my
brother's shirt'.

Since then he has written dozens of poems and travelled to dozens
of countries; he has enjoyed great fame, but he has never changed.
Whenever I meet him, however many years have elapsed, we always
start at once to talk about the present moment.

People have said, and I agree, that Neruda looks like an Inca stone
statue of a Buddha. (The Inca gods, however, were cruel, whereas
Pablo Neruda has a gentle nature.) His life has been full of turbulent
incidents, but he enjoys and has always enjoyed relaxing, talking about
unimportant matters or pondering over deep ones. He makes the
impression of a somewhat phlegmatic – even lazy – Buddha;
nevertheless, he has written an enormous quantity of verse. Some of his
poems are strident, but he can speak softly too, in a voice more like
that of a plaintive child than of a leader. His friend Baltasar Castro,
the President of the Chamber of Deputies, tells a typical story about
him. Early in their acquaintance, Neruda rang him up to let him know
that some vexatious matter had been happily resolved. The voice,
which sounded as if it came from a great distance, announced in grief-
stricken accents: 'Victory, Baltasar!'

Neruda is a passionate collector of all manner of objects but, above
all, of the huge wooden figure-heads that once adorned the prows of
sailing ships and, at the other end of the scale, tiny sea shells. His house
on Isla Negra on the Pacific coast is full of old ships' compasses, hour-
glasses and marine charts. When the Chinese poet I Chin visited
Neruda's house he asked him whether he saw himself as a captain or an
ordinary seaman. Neruda said: 'I'm a captain whose ship has sunk'.
This was a piece of poetic licence: I have never known Pablo's ship in
danger of sinking, or even adrift. In one of the museums in China his
attention was caught by a small sea shell which was not in his collec-
tion. He talked about it at such length that his Chinese hosts gave him
the rare exhibit. After which, for two hours, in the most lugubrious
tones but with a happy smile, Pablo explained to me the great value of
this shell. He bought *pâpier maché* tigers in the Chinese toyshops.
They were incredibly ferocious looking, but at the same time comical.
(We did not know then that ten years later the Chinese would call
American imperialism a 'paper tiger'.)

Neruda is a very gregarious man. In Prague, whatever time of day I came to see him, there were always people sitting or standing about in his room: Communists from Chile, Czech poets, and journalists of every nationality. When Lyuba and I stayed at his house in Santiago we felt as though we were living in a public square. Once I wanted to change during the day but had to give up the idea altogether because Neruda's female admirers were constantly wandering about and peeping into the room. Fifteen to twenty people sat down to lunch in his house every day. He once asked me in an undertone: 'Do you know who that chap is, the one at the end on your left?'

In the summer of 1954 I went to Chile at Neruda's invitation and was given the task of delivering a peace prize to him. I was delighted at the chance of visiting Latin America. The Soviet Union had no diplomatic relations with Chile but Lyuba and I were granted visas. I looked forward to an enchanting trip. Not only were the Chileans celebrating Neruda's fiftieth birthday that summer, but the cold war had begun to subside. Two months previously I had presented a peace prize to Pierre Cot in Paris and it had all been most correct, with deputies of various political parties attending the ceremony.

I had forgotten how far away Chile was: it took us forty-eight hours to reach it by air from Stockholm, and when we arrived in Chile, though it was August, we found ourselves in winter. And we found also that the cold war was still in full blast there.

At Santiago airport the police handled our passports with curiosity, though politely enough, the customs officers barely glanced at our open suitcases, and we were making for the vestibule where Neruda with Zelia and Jorge Amado, who had come for the birthday celebrations, were waiting for us, when suddenly officials of the special police – known for some reason as 'international' – appeared. They were in a belligerent mood and began furiously throwing out the contents of our suitcases. They snatched everything out of my brief-case; I tried to hang on to the diploma which I was to present to Neruda but one of the policemen, muscled like a bruiser, squeezed my hands so hard that it was all I could do not to cry out. Fortunately they did not find the gold medal which was in Lyuba's handbag: if it had fallen into their hands we should never have seen it again; one of their principal officers was a complete scoundrel who was arrested shortly afterwards for some shady deals in astrakhan fur.

The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Baltasar Castro, arrived

at the airport, but even he could do nothing. Neruda took us to his house, lit a fire in the open hearth – something he seldom did – and began to tell us about the wonderful things we should see in Chile.

The next day my photograph was in all the papers. The police stated that I had tried to smuggle in gramophone records with secret instructions to the Communist Parties of Chile and other Latin American countries, coded names of Party cells, and five million pesos. This last item the Ministry of Justice immediately denied, fearing that it would have to return the money which, of course, the police could not have confiscated since I never had it. Nor did I have any records with secret instructions or popular songs. As for the coded documents, these were notes of the Latin names of certain plants, the seeds of which I hoped to be able to get in the land of their habitat, and French crosswords I had been doing to pass the time on the flight.

The situation became fantastic. One night fire-bombs were thrown at Neruda's house but the fire was soon put out. Another night we were awakened by shouting. 'They won't even let you sleep in peace,' said Lyuba, and immediately fell asleep again. In the morning we learnt that a loudspeaker van had driven up to the house and roused the whole street. Neruda's gardener had remonstrated with the disturbers of the peace: 'Aren't you ashamed to wake people up?' One of them replied: 'We'll have finished in five minutes and then we'll leave'. The press reported that it was some Russians, flown in for the purpose from New York, who had been appealing to me to 'choose freedom' and to fly with them back to New York as the Reds would never forgive me for writing *The Thaw*; that they had urged Lyuba to 'save Ilya and yourself'; that she had tried to throw herself out of a second-floor window but was prevented by 'two towering Cheka agents'. The papers printed all this despite the fact that Santiago is quite a small town in which everybody knew that Neruda's house had only one storey.

The walls were covered with slogans: 'Ehrenburg go home!' 'Chile – yes, Russia – no!' The papers gave out the information that I had hanged a number of innocent people in Moscow. 'Ehrenburg is accompanied by a seasoned Cheka agent who goes under the name of Lyuba'. The readers were probably deeply impressed by the news that the Russians called Neruda 'Hepyda': the journalists had got this from reading his name in Cyrillic (as well as in Latin) characters on the diploma.

For a week I became the most notable figure in Santiago. My friends advised me to lie low, for it seemed that the fascists intended to beat me up. This did not stop me going frequently into the town (Neruda's house is in a suburb), either with Pablo or with some one of his friends. One day Pablo took me to a working class district. At the end of an hour the chauffeur who acted as my bodyguard cried for mercy: 'If we go on any longer I'll die of heart failure'. This was because the workers recognized me and kept rushing up to greet me, which put the chauffeur, thinking they might be fascists, into a great state of alarm.

Everybody seemed to have lost their heads. Pablo alone remained completely unruffled, writing poetry, taking his siesta as usual and telling entertaining stories. He said that he had not expected these happenings, though they were not really to be wondered at: the Yankees were behaving as if the country belonged to them, but there would soon be an end to that, and then I should be able to come again and he would show me Valparaiso and southern Chile, and I should see that this was the most beautiful country in the world.

I got in touch by telephone with our ambassador in Argentina and asked him to inform Moscow of the situation. Three days later the United Press reported that the Moscow newspapers were denouncing the 'arbitrary actions of the Chilean police'. The government of Chile realized that they had gone too far. I also went with Neruda to the Argentine ambassador, who had been responsible for the protection of the interests of Soviet citizens since the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Chile and the Soviet Union. We were the first such citizens to have appealed to the ambassador; he said he would consult Buenos Aires, and went on to say that he was a great admirer of Neruda's poetry, eyeing me the while curiously but with slight apprehension. Later he informed Neruda that he had called on the aged President of Chile who was interested to hear that I wanted to buy the seeds of certain species of begonia and had said that this might be the start of trade relations between the two countries.

One day two visitors came to Neruda's house. He was out, and his friends, who seemed to spend all their time at his place, took these people for two of his unknown admirers. However, they said they wished to speak to me and produced police badges. It appeared that they had come to return the diploma. The folder was in a terrible state: the newspapers claimed that it had been subjected to various chemical

tests. When Pablo came home I showed it to him. He smiled and said in his mournful voice: 'Didn't I tell you we should win?'

The ceremony of presenting the prize had to be organized. This was not easy as the fascists threatened to take their own measures. We held a council of war with a number of Communists, Baltasar Castro, various Chilean writers and, of course, Jorge Amado. We took a hall in a big hotel but the problem was how to ensure order. We decided that for one night students should occupy the centre of the town. However, after some thought the Communists said that this was not good enough and added a few thousand workers to the students.

The whole thing went off peacefully. The hall was packed. There were speeches by writers and by politicians of various parties. One old writer, forgetting that the celebration was in Neruda's honour and not in mine, began to count slowly in Russian, this being his way of paying a tribute to the Russians. I saw Jorge writhing with suppressed laughter, but Pablo listened with a straight face and then made an inspired speech. A famous actor recited Chekhov's monologue *On the Harmfulness of Tobacco*.

On the eve of our departure I gave a dinner for the prize-winner. Among the guests were the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Information. Five days previously the Minister of Justice had announced that I was to be tried in a Chilean court; the Minister of Information had daily fed preposterous stories to the press. There was plenty of wine and the Minister of Justice, having become rather merry, raised his glass and begged me not to identify the Chilean government with the police.

(The Argentine ambassador gave us visas and we spent several days in Buenos Aires where our old friends Rafael Alberti and Maria-Teresa León had been living for some time. The Argentine writers invited us to a reception. We had to chat standing up because, it was explained, if we sat down the function would be considered a meeting, and meetings were strictly forbidden. On the last day of our stay we were returning from a drive with one of the secretaries from our embassy. Our Argentine friends had been showing us the beautiful countryside beyond the city. We were late coming back, and as I had promised the embassy staff to relate the picturesque episodes of my stay in Chile, we hurried out of the car. At that moment there was a crash: facing our embassy was a steep street from where two men, who made themselves scarce, had sent a truck hurtling down on our

car. It was wrecked, and we ourselves were unhurt only because in our haste we had literally leapt out of the car.)

All this was in the year 1954 but, if one leaves out some of the more fantastic details, it can serve as a fair illustration of the cold war in action, to which I have referred in earlier chapters. Ten years have passed since then; there have been many changes in the world and in Neruda's country too. Recently some Soviet writers visited Chile and Margarita Aliger told me that their reception was altogether friendly.

Pablo Neruda will soon be sixty. In one of his poems, called *I Ask for Silence*, he pleads: 'And now leave me in peace. And now do without me'. However, a week or perhaps a month later he again plunges into the sea of life. Explaining how he has met the bitterness of some disillusionments, he says that when ships are sunk he snatches up his axe again, for he is a shipbuilder: 'Those ships were my faith. I have no way out but to live'.

I have said so much about the tragic fate of certain writers and painters that I must say a word, if only in passing, about a great poet who is happy. Of course Neruda has known moments of despair and disillusion, unhappy love and other unavoidable experiences, but he has never denied life nor has life ever denied him. He opposed the powerful ones of this world, he became a Communist, found friends and made enemies in consequence, but when he was abused it was by his enemies, and he has never known what it is to be gravely injured by one's own people. He has always written what he pleased and how he pleased. When I was translating one of his poems I came across an image that puzzled me. I asked him: 'Pablo, why are the Indians blue?' He explained at some length that he had seen some Indians at twilight on the shores of a lake and they had seemed to have a bluish tinge. 'But there's nothing about that in the poem.' 'Yes, I know,' he said, 'but I'd rather they stayed blue.' Of course he was right.

One might say that luck was always with him. But this is hardly an explanation. The fact is that Neruda never chose the easy way, yet what he saw on his difficult road, when people round him were falling, weeping and cursing their lot, was not baseness but nobility, not tares but roses: that was the way his eyes and his heart responded.

Here we have him in a chastened mood: it is not about the people's struggle, not about the Andes and the volcanoes that he is writing, but he is allowing himself to complain: 'I am very tired of hens: we do not know what they are thinking, they look about with dry eyes and dis-

regard us altogether . . . Let's get tired, if only once or twice a week, because the days are always called the same, like a dish on a table.' This is not an old man's spleen but a child's mischievousness, and Neruda ends the poem by saying that young people will come and discover the dawn or give new names to kisses.

Yes, he was indeed lucky, but it was the kind of luck with which one is born, for it did not stem from favourable circumstances, nor even from an optimistic philosophy, and certainly not from self-love, but from the man's wonderful nature.

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WE SPENT a little over a month in China. As well as seeing Peking we went to Shanghai and Hangchow, into many villages and saw the Great Wall and the Ming tombs.

Everything was new to me, I was seeing Asia for the first time. It is true that our solicitous hosts sometimes guarded us too well on the plea that things were still unquiet; interpreters accompanied me everywhere. (Only once in Hangchow I succeeded in evading them and wandered about the town on my own.) Much time was taken up by receptions, banquets, conferences and meetings. Still, there were endless new impressions, though I did not have the audacity to write anything about China: I had seen far too little to claim an understanding of this country with its ancient civilization, where the Revolution had only so recently triumphed and where the new was inextricably woven into the old; but I saw enough to realize that I did not understand anything, and this saved me from reaching superficial conclusions.

What I am writing about in these memoirs is not a series of countries but my own life. The journey to China taught me much: in my old age I began to discard the blinkers of a European upbringing. And today I am not afraid of recounting my impressions, even if in a rather disjointed and perhaps naive way, because no one will mistake them for an attempt to present a picture of China.

In North America, which I had visited before China, and later in Latin America, in India, in Japan and, naturally, in China itself, many things took me by surprise. The traveller's attention is generally struck above all by the things he does not understand, and I am no exception.

On the very first day after our arrival some Chinese writers came to see me. They addressed me as 'Ai-Len-Bo', and it took me some little time to realize that these strange syllables stood for 'Ehrenburg'. In Chinese almost all words consist of one syllable and proper names are made up of two or three words. Foreign names can be given either a laudatory or an unflattering meaning, according to the feeling aroused

by the individual. Ai-Len-Bo shows kindly feeling because it means 'the strength of love'. Fadeyev in Chinese is Fa-Dai-Fu which he proudly told me means 'strict law'. Certain sounds in European languages, as for instance *r*, do not exist in Chinese. People who spoke to me about the famous French author Bal Bu were surprised that I did not know him until I discovered that they meant Barbusse.

Reading and writing are a complicated science in China; to be able to read newspapers and books using a simple vocabulary one must know several thousands of characters. Kuo Mo-jo knows ten thousand, he can write everything, but there are not many people who can read this 'everything'. In Shanghai we were taken round a large printing works. Thousands of cases containing characters were ranged on a wall and the compositors nimbly climbed ladders to get the necessary ideograms. When a page has been printed the characters are melted down, because sorting them would be too difficult. The compositors are well-educated men, they know more characters than the average reader, and a knowledge of ideograms is a knowledge of ideas. I expressed surprise that the Chinese did not adopt phonetic spelling, like the Vietnamese and, to some extent, the Japanese. It was explained to me that in that case people living in Canton would be unable to read newspapers and books printed in Peking. In the north, tea is *cha*, in the south it is *te*, though the character is the same. At the meetings of the World Peace Council I often saw elderly Vietnamese exchanging notes with Chinese and Korean delegates: they could not converse orally with each other but they could read the characters.

On the day after our arrival we were invited to the Peace Committee where I was shown plans illustrating the various phases of the ceremony for presenting the prize. 'There is one thing on which we are not clear,' our Chinese friends said. 'How are you going to present the medal to Madame Soong Ching Ling - with both hands or with one?' I said that this was not important, I could do it either way. 'It has great importance; you must do it as it is done in Moscow.' Although Skobeltsyn had on several occasions presented the prize in my presence I could not remember whether he held the diploma and the medal in one hand or in both. The discussion went on for a long time. The Chinese take any kind of ceremony far more seriously than Europeans do and they have countless rules of conduct which must not be disregarded.

A fortnight later we attended a reception to celebrate the second

anniversary of the proclamation of the People's Republic. We were lined up and told: 'You will go up to Comrade Mao Tse-tung and congratulate him on the festival'. Lyuba was at the head of the line. On entering the hall she started towards the platform where the members of the government sat. The Chinese stopped her just in time: the proper thing was to walk round in a semi-circle.

At the first banquet I was overwhelmed: for some three hours dish upon dish appeared; there were at least thirty in all and the order in which they were served was rather strange to a European: after the sweet I sighed with relief thinking that the meal was now coming to an end, but not at all – the sweet was followed by fish, then by soup, and last of all came dry rice. Chinese cooking is extremely elaborate and you can seldom make out what exactly you are eating. On one occasion, when the authoress Ting Ling was entertaining us, I enjoyed one of the dishes so much that I asked the hostess what it was. She could not tell us and sent for the cook who gave something like a report; the interpreter, however, knew neither a chicken's anatomy nor the Russian names of herbs, so the nature of the dish is still a mystery.

I was rather shaken when a certain writer, smiling as he spoke, said that he had been unable to meet me sooner because his wife had been very ill and, in fact, had died three days ago. It made my flesh creep. Afterwards I remembered Emi Siao telling me: 'In China when we mention a sad event we smile so that the person addressed should not be grieved'.

In China I gave serious thought for the first time to conventions, traditions and codes of behaviour. It seems odd that Asian manners and customs should astonish Europeans who certainly have conventions enough of their own. Europeans stretch out a hand in greeting so that a Chinese, a Japanese or an Indian is obliged to grasp the limb of a stranger. But if some foreigner were to offer his bare foot to a Parisian or a Muscovite, he would hardly be pleased. The Viennese say *küss die Hand* without thinking about the meaning of the words, while a Warsaw citizen when introduced to a lady automatically kisses her hand. An Englishman, outraged by a competitor's sharp practice, can write to him: 'Dear Sir, you are a swindler'; what he cannot do is to write a letter that does not start with: 'Dear Sir'. Christians going into a church of any denomination take off their hats, while a Jew entering a synagogue covers his head. In Catholic countries women used

not to enter a church with uncovered heads. In Europe the colour of mourning is black, in China it is white. When a Chinese sees a European or an American walking arm in arm with a woman, and sometimes even kissing her, it strikes him as utterly shameless. In Japan one must not go into a house without taking off one's shoes: in Japanese restaurants men wearing European suits sit on the floor in their socks.

In the Peking hotel the furniture was European but the entrance into the room was traditionally Chinese: a screen prevented one from walking straight in; this is because legend has it that the devil goes straight ahead, whereas according to our ideas the devil is so cunning that he can get round any impediment. If a guest in a European house admires a picture, a vase, or some other ornament, it gives the host pleasure. If a European expresses delight at something in the house of a Chinese, the host makes him a present of it: good manners require it. My mother taught me never to leave anything on my plate when eating in someone else's house. In China no one touches the bowl of dry rice which is served at the end of a meal: you must show that you cannot eat any more. The world is full of variety and it is not worth while racking one's brains over this custom or that.

In 1951 there were many Soviet professional workers in China: engineers, agronomists and doctors; they worked with selfless zeal and were very unassuming. At that time the Chinese valued Soviet assistance and received the Russians as welcome guests. However, even then the difference in conventions created obstacles to friendship. Soviet engineers were setting up the equipment in one of the new factories; the machine tools were adapted to the height of the Russians who are on an average slightly taller than the Chinese. The engineers said it would be easy to compensate for this by laying raised boards in front of the benches. The Chinese smiled and later informed the embassy that they would set up the equipment themselves. They put in a lot of hard work digging the machine tools into the ground. Evidently raised boards appeared to them in some way humiliating. When I recall this incident I cannot help thinking how many disagreements and wounded susceptibilities result from pure chance, from the fact that people who feel, react and even think alike are accustomed to different ways of expressing their feelings and reactions and to different associations of ideas.

After the presentation of the peace prize artists of the Peking classical opera performed a number of scenes. I was listening to Chinese

music for the first time. I was much struck by it and also surprised by the acting technique and the content of the play. I was sitting amongst various Chinese Ministers; they were completely absorbed and living every moment of what was being enacted on the stage. Afterwards I went several times to the play in Peking and Shanghai and began to understand the charm of the Chinese theatre. It is, of course, in complete contrast with realism: it is as complicated as a hieroglyphic, full of conventional symbols; but all art is unthinkable without conventions, the only difference is that those we know from childhood we accept. It seems natural to us that Boris Godunov, a clever man and sparing of words, should sing all the time on the stage; and that in the ballet Romeo and Juliet should dance as they die. I have described how laughable I found the French tragedian Mounet-Sully ranting and roaring in the role of Oedipus, for at the time the only theatre I knew was one where everything was 'as in real life'. Some Moscow audiences derided Meyerhold's productions: they found the green wig worn by one of the characters in *Les* (The Forest) a comical, because unusual, symbol. When I saw Mounet-Sully I was eighteen, but Mei Lan-fang I first saw at the age of sixty. The famous actor played the part of a young girl in love, his son that of a maid; it was an all-male cast. At the Shanghai opera the cast was entirely female, women playing the parts of army leaders and bearded mandarins. The conventions of the Chinese theatre astounded me because they were unfamiliar. Later it was explained that when an actor shook his hands over his head it meant that he was frightened; the number of little pennants on a general's shoulder indicated how many regiments were under his command; if he went through the mime of drinking tea it was a sign that he was parleying with his adversary; a red face bore witness to the character's uprightness, a white one evinced dishonesty, and so on. Every Chinese, even an illiterate one, makes sense of the symbolism of the theatre.

N. T. Fedorenko, who was a counsellor at our embassy at the time, was very helpful. He knows Chinese and Chinese literature, both old and new. He opened my eyes to many things.

Chinese poets told me that poetry should not be heard but read, because the ideograms conjured up the image. Guillaume Apollinaire wrote his *Calligrammes*: poems in the form of a bowl or a cross or a tower; his material was scant enough – merely the Latin alphabet – but he tried to produce the same effect as the Chinese poets.

At one of the dinners I was presented with a poem. I sat admiring the beautifully traced characters for a long time. I thought the author was a professional poet, but he turned out to be the director of the People's Bank. He explained that he was getting on in years and in old age everyone should have mastered the art of versification. The content of the poem was in the classical tradition, but to the eye it appeared far more expressive than the *calligrammes* of one of the greatest twentieth-century poets. Evidently craftsmanship is the heritage of centuries. I consider Tyutchev a great Russian poet, but the verses he wrote in French might have been written by any French student.

In Peking I saw the work of the artist Chi Pai-shih; he was then over eighty. His drawings were in the traditional manner but he was very gifted. I found his horses and squirrels delightful. Some of the Chinese shrugged their shoulders: what was the point of doing what had been done many centuries before? It is quite true that Chi Pai-shih had brought nothing new to painting – the horses and squirrels have not changed – whereas the great eleventh-century landscape painter Kuo Hsi was no imitator but an innovator. All the same I want to take up the cudgels in defence of this good craftsman. When certain Chinese artists began to paint vast canvases they appeared neither as innovators nor even as successors, but as clumsy imitators. (In India I saw modern painting which, without aping the French masters and while retaining a national character, depicted the world in a different way from that of the ancient frescoes of Ajanta. Something similar will probably happen one of these days in China.)

What strikes one in classical Chinese art is not so much the imagination, the flights of fancy or even the boldness of the artist as his extraordinary patience and faultless technique. These qualities are in the character of the people. In the parks I admired 'trees of love' and 'trees of friendship' – two or five trees that had grown into one: to dictate the growth of a tree requires both a great knowledge of arboriculture and tremendous perseverance. I did not find in China what we in Europe call folk-art. In Peking there were hundreds of streets where craftsmen lived, worked and sold the things they made: there was the street of baskets, the street of brushes, the street of pots for medicinal herb-tea, the street of theatrical beards and the street of toys, where paper tigers, kites, tiny birds and so on were made. All the things in everyday use by the Chinese were distinguished by the beauty of their

proportions and a feeling for the material used, compared with which European household objects seem hideous.

The People's Republic was only two years old when I went to China. There were still rickshaws in Shanghai, smart women wearing Paris dresses and old men who would not give up their traditional long coats. But in Peking men and women were dressed alike in blue tunics and trousers. Many covered their mouths and noses with white gauze, a fashion introduced by the Japanese to protect them against the fine sand carried by the winds from the Gobi desert. There was trading everywhere in all kinds of goods: antiques, sweets, silk and ginseng.

I was impressed by the discipline of the people. The young Chinese had now provided themselves with ball-pens and at the gatherings and meetings I attended they all sat listening attentively and making notes. I often had to speak and when I occasionally made a joke (in case the audience might grow bored) they took down the joke as well. Papers read by the Chinese at meetings were always extremely long, lasting some four or five hours. Performances are also very protracted by European standards; a play will sometimes be spread over two evenings.

Here and there, in a school garden, under a tree, or in a community centre in a village, I noticed small gatherings of twenty to thirty people; here, too, they were listening and taking notes. The interpreter explained that these were sessions of 'criticism and self-criticism'. The business of these meetings was certainly not of the traditional type: they discussed the fact that a student had concealed his social origin, that an unmarried woman was pregnant, that a worker had come late to work, but the form was essentially Chinese: someone was making a long confession of his faults, while the others listened and took notes.

Near the town of Hangchow, in a poetical natural setting, I saw the tomb of the famous twelfth-century military chief Yo Fei. He fought off the attacks of the Jurchens and was later recalled to the capital and executed. By his tomb are two kneeling bronze figures, one of the man who betrayed him and the other of his wife. A group of schoolboys was there on a sightseeing tour. One of the boys spat in the face of the traitor, and his comrades immediately followed suit. The Chinese who was showing us the military chief's tomb was not too well versed in ancient history and did not know who the Jurchens were, but he approved of the schoolboys' gesture and said: 'That man was a traitor

eight hundred and ten years ago'. The Chinese whom I met paid great attention to dates and anniversaries and, when setting forth their arguments, would say 'fifthly', 'sixthly', 'seventhly'.

Buddhism, as well as other religions, played a rather subordinate role in China. In the pagodas I visited, gilded statues of fat Buddhas glistened, while not at all fat monks padded about busily selling leaflets of some sort; the worshippers drank tea, or slept. The place of religion was taken by the simplified moral code of Confucianism: be honest, respect your superiors and revere your ancestors. There were no graveyards, however, in the villages, and the peasants were obliged to find room for the tombs of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers in their tiny fields, many of them no larger than a suburban garden.

In a village near Peking I was told about a landless peasant who had not known where to bury his father. He begged on his knees for permission to bury him on the landlord's property. Permission was granted on condition that the poor fellow worked it off by so many months' labour.

As its first measure the People's Republic introduced agrarian reform, putting an end to feudalism. There were, of course, rich men among the landlords, but I visited some manors compared with which the house of an average Danish peasant would seem a palace.

The parcelling out of the large estates did away with injustice – this was the first step. A young man said to me in Peking: 'Soon we shall overtake our elder brother in the building of Communist society' (in those days the Chinese called the Soviet Union their elder brother). But in the villages I went to the ancient wooden plough was still in use. The peasants' huts were tiny, with a low stove on which the family slept. Food was meagre: a bowl of rice, sometimes a parsnip or a few cabbage leaves. Village women still behaved in a submissive manner. I noticed barefooted peasants and children with ulcerated heads. Five years later, in India, when I saw peasants wasted with hunger, tottering starved cows, and the homeless, the dying and the leprous in the streets of Calcutta, I realized that everything is relative. There were no horrors of this kind in China, but in 1951 the standard of life for the majority of the Chinese was far below that of the poorest parts of Europe. Friends who visited China a few years later told me that there had been great changes: thousands of schools, hospitals, maternity homes and crèches had been built. What I had witnessed was new China's early morning: there was mass vaccination, children and

adults were being taught to read and write, and the slums of Shanghai were being cleared. Many Asian countries in those days saw China as a miracle-working prophet. When I was in Delhi in 1956 a Chinese delegation arrived and it would be impossible give an adequate description of their enthusiastic welcome by the Indians.

The historical paths of India and China are different and yet they have much in common. Three hundred years before our era Indian cities had sewers. In the third century B.C. the Chinese built the Great Wall to protect their country from invading hordes. They began to produce silk two thousand years before our era, in the fifth century B.C. they dug irrigation canals and manufactured paper. The Chinese invented the compass, the seismograph, porcelain and printing with movable type (four hundred years before Gutenberg). They invented gunpowder and many other things which the Europeans adopted much later from the Arabs. In the third century B.C. the Indian ruler Asoka formulated the principles of peace in accordance with which he took a decision never to be the first to start a war. (When we of the peace movement advocated similar principles, we were hotly attacked.) Feudal quarrels, invasions and wars which were forced on them exhausted the two great Asian States at the very time when western Europe had familiarized itself with the use of gunpowder and was equipped with cannons and battleships. India was conquered piecemeal, the lion's share going to the British. China continued to exist as a State but received ultimata: punitive expeditions were sent into its territory and enslaving treaties were imposed on it. India achieved independence in 1950, remaining within the Commonwealth and retaining the old social system. China had become a People's Republic a year earlier. The Americans created a 'second China' on the island of Taiwan.

Every Chinese remembers the old wrongs. It is enough to recall the Opium Wars when the British, angered by the prohibition of the import of opium into China, succeeded by armed force in prolonging their right to poison the Chinese; this was in the period of Chartism, of the growth of the trade unions, in the days of Dickens, Thackeray and Turner. These things were in my thoughts when I was in China, and later in India. The peoples of Asia have a long reckoning with those who wronged them: there are some accounts which are not easy to settle.

But to return to 1951. Having got my bearings slightly, I realized

that it was the outward form of life rather than its content which differed from the one I knew. This emerged in a variety of ways. Once Neruda and I drove to the cemetery to lay flowers on the tomb of Lu Hsun where we met a Chinese lady of our acquaintance. We went with her to look for the common grave of Chiang Kai-shek's victims where her husband's remains were. She tried to smile, as courtesy decreed, but could not keep it up and dissolved into tears. I heard stories of unhappy love. The poet I Chin told me of the difficulties which beset a poet and what he said reminded me of experiences in my own life. I met people who had read my novels. Everything, in fact, was both simpler and more complex than it appears to the tourist who is interested only in the exotic.

With India I fell in love. Talking to people there, I lost sight of the fact that they were children of 'a land of wonders'¹.

A year later I was in Japan and saw that the kind of architecture we dreamt of in the early twenties was an inseparable part of the Japanese way of life.

This chapter reads almost like an interpolated travel article, yet I am setting down only the things that excited me, and still do. It so happens that the years of my life straddle two epochs. The October Revolution, the startling advances in science, the awakening of the nations of Asia and Africa have ushered in a new era. In my declining years I came to understand many new things. There is a lot of talk nowadays about the coming conquest of outer space, but it has taken me all my life to assimilate something of our own planet.

At school I was taught Latin. I learnt about the feuds of the Russian princes and the exploits of the classical Greek gods and goddesses. Later I read widely and indiscriminately; I trudged through the museums and galleries; I marvelled at the Renaissance. But my ideas about Asian countries were derived entirely from books written by Europeans and from a few examples of ancient art. And the books were chosen haphazard: Madame Blavatsky on 'mysterious India', Kipling on jungles and fearless white men, and the author of a history of Buddhism (lent to me by Voloshin) who thought highly of Nirvana. Later I saw the work of Hokusai and Utamaro, eighteenth-century masters, but I knew nothing of the portraits by Sesshiu who lived in the fifteenth century. My idea of Japan was based on Pilnyak's book,

¹ From Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko*.

on a satirical novel by a second-rate French writer who was fashionable at the time, and on trumpery objects in curio-shops – tea-pots, screens and suchlike. I read Romain Rolland on Gandhi and his followers, verses by Rabindranath Tagore and a couple of books on British atrocities, the caste system, the famines and Yogis. When I saw *Sākuntalā* at the Kamerny Theatre in 1917, I was entranced: I knew nothing about Kālidāsa, and the play, written fifteen centuries ago, seemed to me quite modern. In the twenties the journals and newspapers were full of revolutionary China. I followed the events in Canton, I read Malraux's *La condition humaine* and a French book on Confucius. I detail the full extent of my ignorance in this way because a sketchy knowledge of Asia was a common failing among Europeans, causing educated Indians and Chinese to treat the Western intelligentsia with a certain disdain.

The two worlds coexisted, far from peacefully, and a wall separated them.

Kipling's words about East and West – that 'never the twain shall meet' – have often been interpreted in a very crude fashion and quoted less by poetry lovers than by politicians. But East and West *have* met; they meet today and I hope they will go on meeting.

The works of Japanese artists made me realize how much the French Impressionists had learnt from them. The French Encyclopedists studied the philosophers of old China. English philologists in the mid-nineteenth century borrowed from the oldest Indian grammar. The modern Chinese theatre caused a sensation in Paris and enriched the theatrical vocabulary of French producers.

East and West have a common source, and no matter how varied the arms of a river may be, as they separate and come together again, the river flows on.

Ideas based on the unity of culture, on the solidarity of men and nations can become universal, whereas racism and nationalism (no matter where they originate), with their emphasis on priority and superiority, inevitably giving rise to hostility, dividing nations, cheapening culture and, in the long run, leading to general disaster. These thoughts have been much in my mind during the years I have been writing these memoirs, and they come back to me now when I listen to the Chinese text-mongers lecturing us on the radio. The dawn of the new era is not likely to be idyllic, but I refuse to believe that even people who are convinced of the superiority of their blood, or their

religion, or the absolute verity of their particular interpretation of some doctrine or dogma will ever dare to pass from verbal hair-splitting over their controversial truths and other people's controversial errors to the use of weapons capable of annihilating not only all errors but also all truths.

29

IN 1949 I ended one of my articles with these words: 'As I reflect on the destiny of our age I recall the poem of the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet called *The Twentieth Century*: 'Let's fall asleep now and wake up in a hundred years, my beloved...'

No / I am not a deserter / Besides my century does not frighten me, / My wretched century, blushing from shame, My courageous century / blushing from shame / my courageous century / great / and heroic. / I have never grieved that I was born too soon / I am from the twentieth century / And I am proud of it...'

This was written by a Communist who had spent twelve years in gaol, had been sentenced to twenty-eight years' imprisonment and knew that he had heart disease. When you read those lines a lump rises in your throat, you want to press that distant hand and say: 'They will never vanquish life while we have so many noble, honest, courageous friends'.

At that time Nazim Hikmet was still in a Turkish prison. Two years later I did, indeed, press his hand. One autumn evening he invited Lyuba and me to visit him where he was living, across the street from the offices of *Pravda*, in a flat that the authorities had put at his disposal. We scarcely knew one another but almost at once Hikmet began talking about the things that mattered to him most. (He was too often liable to say whatever came into his head, which upset some people, though in the long run they found it disarming. A comrade once remarked: 'But Nazim Hikmet said it, and he's in a class by himself'.) On that first evening we spent together he admitted that he was baffled by certain things. It started with a figurine in his flat: 'You know, I can't bear to look at it. It's perfectly hideous, utterly vulgar. But what can I do? The flat's government property and I'm a guest here'. He said that he had the use of a car. 'I go out in the morning and the driver asks: "Where to, governor?" I say: "I'm not a governor, I'm a poet, I'm a Communist, I spent years in a Turkish gaol". He says: "All right, if not governor, then boss". They proclaim Mayakovsky as a genius, yet when I read the poems in the journals Mayakovsky doesn't

seem to have left a trace. I was taken to the theatre. It's as if Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Tairov had never existed.'

This is no new tragedy: a man is out of touch with life for many years and on his return feels completely at sea. There are old French songs about a soldier or a sailor returning from the wars who does not recognize his wife, while she takes him for a stranger. One can put hearts into deep freeze like strawberries; it's all a matter of time. Nazim was arrested in 1937, but in Turkey, not in the Soviet Union. He knew nothing about the death of Meyerhold, whom he greatly admired; he did not know that instead of 'nor tsar, nor god, nor hero'¹ they were singing 'Stalin has reared us'; he did not know that the pictures he used to enjoy seeing in our galleries were now stacked away; there was a good deal he did not know.

In prison he wrote verses about Stalin as about an elder comrade. In 1951 he said: 'I have a great respect for Comrade Stalin but I can't bear to read poems which compare him to the sun; it's not just bad poetry, it's a bad sentiment'. And in 1962 he wrote: 'They made him of stone, of bronze, of plaster and of paper, from two inches high to several yards; in all the city squares we were under his boots, under boots made of stone, of bronze, of plaster and of paper'.

Ovations greeted Hikmet wherever he went, as a great poet and a martyr who had spent thirteen years in gaol. He spoke and answered questions, endearing himself to young people by his directness and sincerity. There were instances when his simplicity enabled him to be wise. He had been in Moscow first in 1921 when he was under twenty and the Soviet Republic four years old. It was the epoch of Tatlin's 'Monument to the Third International', of arguments between the Futurists and Imaginists, of Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, an epoch of hunger and of street carnivals. Hikmet spent eight years in the Soviet Union, studying at the Communist University for the Workers of the East and writing poetry and plays; his beliefs and his understanding grew firm, he was tempered like steel. He was blessed with an exceptionally well-integrated personality. His autobiography in verse has the lines: 'Some are familiar with the varieties of herbs, others with the varieties of fish, and I am familiar with the varieties of partings. Some know by heart the names of the stars, but I know those of leavetakings'. (Long before, Osip Mandel-

¹ From the *Internationale* in Russian.

stam said much the same thing: 'I have studied the science of partings'.) Nazim's life was stormy and difficult, but if he knew every kind of parting, the name of every leavetaking, he never tasted the bitterness of lost illusions: to the end of his life he retained the ideas, the leanings and the loyalties of his youth.

Of course he matured (the word 'aged' does not fit him) and grew in perception. The year before his death he wrote: 'I have unlearned blind faith; I am learning to understand'. But as understanding came to him, he realized the truth of what he had earlier believed. One evening, still in Stalin's lifetime, we were sitting in an hotel in Prague and Nazim said: 'When I was in Rumania I asked whether Meyerhold was alive, and one of the comrades said he thought he had died, while another, the one I'd asked, said that he was living in the South, in the Crimea, he thought, or near Sochi, where the climate was milder. I shall never abandon Communism, for me it's the truth. But what's the point of deluding comrades?'

In 1956, or possibly 1957, Nazim told me that at the time of the 'personality cult', shortly before Stalin's death, an old Turkish Communist, a veterinary surgeon had been arrested in the Soviet Union. He was in his late sixties and he died in a concentration camp, but had now been rehabilitated. 'I often think about N.', Nazim said. 'I was lucky. I was gaoled, but by the enemy and I knew I was in hell. It was far worse for the others.'

Nazim was proud of having taken part in a poetry reading with Mayakovsky: 'It was at the Polytechnical Institute. I was very nervous and Mayakovsky said to me: "Don't be frightened, old chap, recite in Turkish, no one'll understand and everybody'll clap"'. Recalling the exhibitions and theatres of those days he now expressed surprise all the time: 'In Vorovsky street,' he said, 'I fell into conversation with two young poets. I told them that I thought Eluard was a fine poet, but they only smiled. I asked them what they thought of Pablo Neruda's poetry which I considered of great literary importance. Again they only smiled. Then one of them said they were against "obsequiousness". I got very angry and said: "But Eluard's a Communist, Neruda's a Communist". It was all the same to them. I can't believe *they're* Communists at all'.

Nazim Hikmet's grandfather had been a pasha, a provincial governor. The grandson became a Communist in his youth and died a Communist. After the 20th Party Congress, when some were shocked

and filled with doubt, he said: 'I believe we all feel a stone has been lifted from our hearts'. On his return from a trip to Paris he said: 'Some people really are extraordinary. When tongues were silent, they had faith, when the truth was told, they began to waver. Communism is a passion, it's life, but for people like that it must have been either a passing infatuation or a routine job'.

Everybody knows that Nazim was a convinced Communist and a great poet, but those who met him know, too, that he was an outstandingly good and generous-hearted man. I once told him that Eluard, on learning about Oradour-sur-Glane, could not at first believe that the Nazis had herded the children into the school building and set fire to it. Nazim said: 'I can understand that. In Turkey there are plenty of savage people, there have been horrible massacres, but when I was told they'd murdered children, I always felt that it must have been made up, or at any rate exaggerated'.

In Rome I saw two volumes of his works: one illustrated by Guttuso, the other by Nazim's friend, the Turkish artist Abidin, who lives in Paris. Nazim was enchanted to hear that I had met Abidin; he did not want to talk about his own work but only about his friend. He had many friends in many different countries, including Pablo Neruda, Aragon, Nezval, Broniewski, Carlo Levi and Amado. He once said, speaking about Eluard's poems: 'It's curious, but when I read them I find that he says just what I wanted to say and in exactly the way I wanted to say it'.

Mayakovsky is generally supposed to have been Nazim Hikmet's teacher, and Nazim himself often said that he regarded Mayakovsky as a model of boldness and human achievement, yet in his own work as a poet he struck out in a different way. He discarded rhyme, saying that poetry was not like music, and though akin to it demanded sounds rather than harmony. At first he followed the lines of the folk-ballad and then went on to create his own form and to an ever-increasing simplicity and limpidity. I have heard him recite in Turkish and I have read him in French and Russian translations; of course this is not enough to judge a poet, yet it seems to me, as it did to Nazim himself, that Eluard was closer to him than any other poet.

His feeling for the art of the twenties was part of his very nature and his aesthetic sense. In poetry he had freed himself from all literary schools, but in his plays there is something archaic, a technique of drama that has now vanished. He loved painting and said that of all

the arts it was the most difficult to appreciate, that to arrive at the 'sweetness of Cézanne's apples' required a profound artistic education. The rebel of the twenties was ready in the fifties to defend with passion any Soviet painter in whom he detected the urge to free himself from academic forms.

We met in Rome; I went to a literary evening where he recited his poems. While there, he explained to me at great length that one ought not to expect art to be easily communicated; sometimes his poems were understood by all, and sometimes only by those who were capable of judging poetry, but he refused to set these above the others. 'You don't put the director of a factory producing attar to tend roses. Every year new kinds of roses are grown, it's not just a question of the attar, a rose has colour as well as fragrance. Some people, the aesthetes, set roses above wheat or Indian corn, while for others roses are merely a small item in a large budget.' He suddenly stopped before a florist's window: 'Look at the roses they've got here'.

I know how easily despair takes hold of one in prison. But Nazim Hikmet spent thirteen years in a stone cage alone with hope. In prison he wrote *Like a Song Sung Together*, an epic of the Turkish people, generous, humane verses which alarmed and still alarm the rulers of Turkey. Twice Nazim went on hunger strike; fettered, he continued the struggle for human dignity.

He looked more like a northerner than a Turk: very tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed. Everywhere – in Moscow and in Rome, in Warsaw and in Paris – he felt at ease; but he was homesick. He covered his sofa in Turkish material; he frequented the 'Baku' restaurant – 'the food here is something like ours' – and whenever he met a Turk at the World Peace Council he could not tear himself away. He once said to me: 'I've been sent an Icelandic translation of my poems. Strange, isn't it? But in Turkey they don't print me. Though even if they did the people for whom I write would still be unable to read me: they're illiterate'. In his poem *Testament* he wrote: 'If I die in a foreign land, comrades, bury me in a village graveyard of Anatolia by the side of the labourer Osman whom Hasan-bey killed. It would be good if a plane-tree grew there, but I can do without a gravestone and an epitaph'.

In 1952 we asked anxiously: 'How is Nazim?' He himself wrote later: 'Lying on my back for four months with a torn heart, I awaited death'. He had had a serious coronary thrombosis. He recovered, but from then on lived in constant proximity to death. I remember once

when, as he was talking gaily at my house – he was an excellent raconteur – his face was suddenly covered with large beads of sweat. In his poems he often reverted to thoughts of death: 'In the rain, along the Moscow asphalt, comes spring on her slender green legs, constricted by tyres, motors, leather, textiles and stones. This morning my cardiogram is bad' . . . 'Will my coffin be carried out through our yard? How will you get me down from the third floor? The coffin will not go into the lift, and the staircase is narrow . . .' 'On the one hand, write poems, each brighter than the last, on the other, converse with death standing at your elbow'.

To mark his sixtieth birthday two literary evenings were organized: one at the Writers' Club, the other for the general public at the Polytechnical Institute. I took the chair at the second one. The hall was so full that people stood and sat on the floor wherever they could, and all eyes seemed to shine with affection for Nazim. I asked him in a low voice: 'Tired?' 'A little,' he said apologetically. 'But very happy.'

He passionately loved life and struggle, and he passionately loved children, poetry and birds. A short time before his death he wrote: 'Let's give the earthly globe to the children, let's give it to them for one day, like a coloured ball for them to play with'. He never stopped enjoying and loving; he flew to Tanganyika and from there wrote letters in verse about Black Africa, about the stars, about struggle and about love.

In 1962 he wrote a poem for his beloved: 'I have put off the idea of death and put on the June leaves of the boulevards'. He died exactly a year later in the early morning of early summer. He woke up, went out into the hall to fetch the paper and did not come back: he sat down and died.

His face as he lay in his coffin had a gentle beauty. An old woman said through her tears to a little girl: 'He died of a burst heart', which was what they called a coronary thrombosis in my youth. We stood by the coffin and it seemed as if the hearts of all of us were ready to burst from the sharp and grievous thought: Nazim is no more.

30

THE YEAR 1952 began for me with funerals. On the last day of the old year Maxim Litvinov died. On the same day a stroke carried off his close friend Yakov Suritz.

I had met Maxim Litvinov in various places and in various circumstances; I visited him in his Moscow home when he was People's Commissar and lived in a wing of a handsome building in the Spiridonovka; I met him in Paris and dined with him in Geneva where he spoke at the League of Nations; I saw him when he was in disgrace, spent an evening with him on the eve of his departure for Washington and had several conversations with him in the post-war years. I cannot say that I knew him intimately for he was rather reserved. He would sit and listen with an occasional ironic and good-humoured smile, putting in a word now and then; but there was nothing grim in his silence and he enjoyed a good laugh. There are optimists who are morose, but Litvinov was a jovial man even though he was often, especially towards the end of his life, given to gloomy thoughts.

I still recall things that Litvinov said, and I was able to observe some of his character traits which are worth describing. He was a man of quite outstanding calibre, as is witnessed by the fact that, in Stalin's time, when any kind of initiative aroused suspicion, 'diplomats of the Litvinov school' were an accepted thing.

I knew almost all the diplomats of this 'school', some better than others. They functioned at a particularly difficult time when the Western powers still planned to destroy the young Soviet Republic; when threats, police raids on embassies and forgeries were everyday occurrences. I have watched our diplomats, as the need arose, use persuasion, skilfully set enemies at loggerheads, or reconcile wavering peace supporters, and win over businessmen and scientists, prominent industrialists and influential writers. Rank and file Soviet citizens knew nothing of this work, and the diplomats themselves were certainly not favoured by fortune. Some of them, such as Krassin, Dovgalevsky, Kobetsky and Divilkovsky died before the days of arbitrary rule. Others – Kollontay, Suritz and Stein – had the luck to die in their

beds. Vorovsky and Voikov were assassinated by anti-Soviet terrorists. Maisky, Rubinin and Gnedin returned alive after many vicissitudes. But many perished. Antonov-Ovseyenko, Krestinsky, Rosenberg, Gaikis, Marchenko, Arens, Hirschfeld, Arosev and Chlenov were the victims of calumny and lawlessness (I have named only those whom I knew personally).

When I think about the fate of my friends and acquaintances there seems no logic to it. Why, for example, did Stalin spare Pasternak who took his own independent line, but destroy Koltsov who honourably carried out every task entrusted to him? Why did he do away with Vavilov and spare Kapitsa? Why, having put to death almost all Litvinov's assistants, did he not have the obstreperous Maxim himself shot? It is extremely puzzling. Certainly Litvinov expected a different ending. From 1937 till his last illness he kept a revolver on his bedside table because, if there were to be a ring at the door in the night, he was not going to wait for what came after.

Litvinov looked the most peaceable sort of man: a portly, good-natured *paterfamilias*. And he devoted his leisure to the most innocent pursuits: abroad, when he had a couple of hours to spare, he went to the cinema. He took pleasure in good food, and it was a joy to watch him eat, with such relish did he dip spring onions into sour cream, so appetisingly did he chew. He loved to pore over a large atlas, map-travelling in distant unknown lands. He loved life. However, this easy-going man was a master of polemics, and Western diplomats treated him warily. Joliot told me that the passage in Litvinov's speech on the inadmissibility of coming to terms with bandits on what quarter of a city they could loot with impunity helped him to realize several years before Munich not only the immorality but the sheer stupidity of Western policy. And I heard Litvinov's phrase about the 'indivisibility of peace' quoted at innumerable congresses and conferences long after his death.

Litvinov spoke of Lenin with veneration: 'There never has been and never will be anyone like him'. Lenin sent Litvinov to Stockholm at a very difficult time, in 1919, at the height of the Intervention, telling him that it was essential to try to find reasonable men in the West and to assess the differences of opinion in the camp of the victors, the resentment of the defeated, the workers' movement, the appetites of potential concessionaires and the standing of scholars and writers. Litvinov knew the West well, having spent many years in exile and

married an Englishwoman. Another thing he said about Lenin was: 'He was a man who understood not only the needs of the Russian peasants but also the mentality of such men as Lloyd George and President Wilson'.

Litvinov was three years older than Stalin. He was reticent in his opinion of him; he appreciated his intelligence and only once, when speaking about foreign policy, said with a sigh: 'He doesn't know the West. If our opponents were a bunch of shahs or sheikhs he would outwit them'.

Litvinov was far from soft. Suritz described to me a scene he had witnessed. In 1936 Suritz had been summoned to Moscow for a conference at which Litvinov expressed his point of view, with which Stalin concurred. He laid his hand on Litvinov's shoulder and said: 'You see, we can reach agreement'. Litvinov removed Stalin's hand and remarked: 'Not for long'.

In an old notebook I have found these words of Litvinov's that I had taken down: 'Titus was notorious for his cruelty. When he seized power, he seemed magnanimous to the Romans and flatterers called him an "ornament to the human race"'. In the same year Vesuvius destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum. Quite possibly the volcano was carrying out the new Emperor's instructions: there were many influential personalities in Pompeii, and Herculaneum was famed for its philosophers and artists'. Reading the note, I remembered the occasion when, as I was coming out of the building which in those days housed the Museum of Literature, I caught sight of Litvinov and accompanied him home. It was a spring day. Litvinov talked about Truman, saying that he was not particularly intelligent, and recalled memories of Roosevelt. I asked him who in his opinion was the greatest living statesman and he replied: 'Well, Stalin of course'. Then, for some reason he went on to talk about a history of ancient Rome by an English author and with a little laugh he uttered the words which I wrote down that night.

At the meeting where Litvinov was attacked and expelled from the Central Committee he indignantly asked Stalin: 'Does this mean that you regard me as an enemy of the people?' As he was leaving the hall Stalin took his pipe out of his mouth and said: 'No, we don't'.

Litvinov was not arrested, but Stalin removed him from all functions in order to destroy him by enforced inaction. However, this did not quite work out at the time. When Hitler attacked the Soviet Union

Stalin sent for Litvinov, shook hands with him in a friendly manner and appointed him to Washington. As far back as 1933 Litvinov had met Roosevelt, then the newly elected President, and had been responsible for the resumption of diplomatic relations. When I was in America Roosevelt's political friends told me that the President had had a great respect for Litvinov and often consulted him on various questions.

In 1943, after the Stalingrad victory, Litvinov was recalled to Moscow. He still held the post of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs but was given work of little importance. In 1947 he was pensioned off, not at his own request. Stalin had issued instructions that he should nevertheless keep his flat and other material advantages. Litvinov was then past seventy; he might have pored over an atlas and lived on his memories, but he was a man who had worked all his life and did not know how to carry on without work; fond of life as he was, he realized that if he were condemned to idleness the engine would stop. He wrote to Stalin thanking him for his consideration and asked to be given something to do. Zhdanov sent for him: 'You have written to Comrade Stalin. We want to put you at the head of the committee dealing with the arts'. Litvinov was furious: 'I know nothing about the arts. Besides, I don't believe art can be the subject of decrees'. This angered Zhdanov: 'What kind of work did you have in mind?' 'Something purely administrative.' He was not given anything. He began to compile a dictionary of synonyms. Every morning he went to the Lenin Library, but suffered acutely from the enforced leisure. Almost daily he met Suritz in the Kremlin canteen and they unburdened their hearts.

A few days before he died he was lying down with his eyes closed. His wife asked him gently whether he was dozing or just thinking. He replied: 'I'm visualizing the map of the world'. What is called 'diplomacy' was, in his case, creative work; his cherished ambition was to fend off war, to bring the nations and continents closer together, and the map of the world was for him what tubes of paint are to the artist. The pensioner was in fact dying like an artist full of creative ideas, but without a palette, without a brush and without light.

The funeral ceremony was held in one of the rooms of the Foreign Office. Someone read a prepared speech. The dead man was clothed not in the diplomat's full dress uniform but in an ordinary suit. His

face looked inscrutably calm, even relaxed. Suritz's daughter Lialia came up to me and said: 'Papa died today'.

Two days later Suritz's remains were borne into the same room. A few members of the Foreign Office staff were present; someone read a speech. At the Nemetsky cemetery Foreign Office uniforms again appeared, another speech was read from a piece of paper and there were wreaths of paper flowers.

I met Suritz for the first time in Berlin in 1922 at an exhibition of Soviet art. He examined the pictures with great care; some of them obviously displeased him, others he seemed to like. He invited me to visit him in Oslo where, he said, there were some good painters. He was a great amateur of art and collected pictures and drawings of the most varied kind. He had works by Rodin and Levitan, Matisse and Korovin, Marquet and Benois. He liked showing them to people and was cross with me for not appreciating the importance of *Mir Iskusstva* (The World of Art), for underestimating Levitan and failing to recognize the qualities of Grabar.

I know little of Suritz's past. On one occasion, when he was talking about the Nazis, he said: 'To think that I studied at Heidelberg University! Why, if I'd been told at the time I'd never have believed it . . . We often speak in abstract terms. Or perhaps words take on a different meaning. "Returning to savagery." Now what did that mean to me in those years? A political miscalculation. Or the popularity of *Sanin*, orgies, thugs. But in Berlin I saw students dragging an old man along the street by his beard, he was covered with blood and they were singing'.

I believe he was the very first Soviet ambassador: Lenin appointed him to Kabul in 1919 when the new amir Amanullah Khan had sent his representatives to Moscow with a letter to Lenin. This was before the birth of Soviet diplomacy, and Suritz combed the archives to find out how to draft his letters of credence. However, Lenin said that they should be worded differently from the form used in the past and he himself drew up the text giving recognition to Afghanistan's full sovereignty and independence. Suritz did not stay long in Kabul; he was appointed ambassador to Norway and Raskolnikov replaced him in Afghanistan.

History judges diplomats, like military commanders, by their successes or failures. Every diplomat, even the most talented, has his Austerlitzes and his Waterloos, for a great deal depends on the

situation. When Suritz was sent to Ankara, Turkey's eyes were turned towards Moscow. Suritz knew his job. The man in the street thinks that a good diplomat is one who knows how to hold his tongue, but he must also know how to speak, how to make something good better and, if it is impossible to avert something bad, at least to slow it down and mitigate it. Suritz won Kemal's confidence and strengthened the bonds of friendship between the two countries. Suritz said of Kemal with admiration: 'A powerful mind. Compared with him Daladier is an ignorant parish-pump politician'.

What could Suritz do in Hitler's Berlin? Only watch and inform Moscow. The American ambassador Dodd, a friend of Roosevelt, noted in his diary his friendly conversations with Suritz, and Dodd's daughter, Martha, told me that Suritz was the only diplomat in Berlin her father had trusted.

In the summer of 1937, when I went to Paris from Spain, I found Suritz at the embassy. He asked me what hopes there were of a breakthrough after the success at Huesca, and then said: 'Here everything is developing in a horrible way'. Later he admitted that, after Berlin, he was enjoying 'the air of Paris'. In his spare time he went to exhibitions, browsed in second-hand bookshops and got to know painters.

(He was always drawn to people in the world of art and letters. At his house in Moscow I met Alexey Tolstoy, Igor Grabar, Alexander Tairov, Alisa Koonen, V. G. Dulova and many others.)

Certainly things in France looked bad. Blum had been replaced by Chaumets, a petty dabbler in politics, who thought it the height of statesmanship to canvass a few votes for the government in the buffet of the Chamber. The Popular Front was falling apart. The bourgeoisie, alarmed by the strikes, had begun to look to Hitler with respect, even hope. France was heading for disaster. Suritz tried to stem the tide; he talked to Herriot, to the French nationalist de Kérillis, who hated the Third Reich, and to the journalist Emile Buré, but events followed their own logic. The war broke out and the pusillanimous rulers of France, who did not have the courage to open fire on the enemy, demanded Suritz's recall.

In an earlier book I have described Suritz at the Grand Hotel in Kuibyshev commanding me to admire a Rodin drawing. He was putting me up for the night, and before showing me the drawing he talked for three hours about our reverses, choking with emotion: 'Of course the pact with Germany was a necessity. The fault lies with

the French, the British and, it goes without saying, Beck. But how has Stalin utilized these two years? It's dreadful to have to say it but he trusted Ribbentrop's signature. He could treat his closest friends with suspicion but believe Hitler'. Suritz may have fancied he was speaking in a whisper but in fact he was shouting and calmed down only when he took the drawing out of his suitcase.

After the war it was proposed that he should be sent to Japan but the doctors stated that he could not stand the climate. Then a country was found for him with a no more favourable climate – Brazil. He did not stay there long: under pressure from Washington Brazil broke off diplomatic relations with the USSR.

Suritz came back to Moscow. He spent his time looking at pictures, reading and thinking. One day he admonished me: 'I know you're ten years younger than I am, but you, too, ought to start thinking about things'.

He had delicate features, a wedge-shaped beard, a large moustache, which he chewed when excited, and shaggy eyebrows. Towards the end of his life he suffered from high blood-pressure and at times lost control and blurted out whatever was on his mind. He would drop in unannounced, drink tea absentmindedly and in silence, and then break out; he could talk for two hours at a stretch, inwardly seething. It nearly always began with the words: 'Yesterday I was talking to Litvinov . . .' followed by a furious harangue. Sometimes he attributed Stalin's actions to 'a pathologically split personality'. An old revolutionary, an internationalist and a typical intellectual, Suritz rejected both the labels of 'obsequiousness to everything foreign' and 'cosmopolitanism', as well as many of the events of the late forties. I shall not repeat his stories about Stalin; they might read like 'exposures' and outwardly broaden, though in essence narrow, the character of this book. Suritz tried to find an explanation for certain aspects of Stalin's nature in an inner divergence between theory and practice. He may have been right, but what I am concerned with here is the anguish of an old, ailing man of great integrity who had worked all his life for the triumph of an idea in which he never ceased to believe and who was witnessing a state of affairs that he found totally unacceptable. He once said in a low voice: 'The trouble isn't only that he doesn't know how the people live, but that he doesn't *want* to know: the people are an *idea* to him and nothing more'.

He would leave and then turn up again a month or two later, unable

to keep silent any longer, and would start: 'Yesterday Litvinov and I were talking about Lozovsky . . .'

There was only one way to soothe him and that was to take him into the room where the Matisse drawings, the Falk landscapes and the Chagall paintings hung. Then his expression, touched by a fleeting smile, would alter. I did not argue with him any more, though not for fear of exciting him; no, it was his passion for art that disarmed me. On one occasion he said slowly, looking at a Matisse drawing: 'Life, too, is a line'.

When we were burying him I recalled these words. What a human line his life had been! Drawings remain, our grandchildren will decipher them easily enough and will perhaps also dip into old books. But who will unravel in the vast tangle of history one slender broken thread, the deeds and the passions of an actor who has vanished from the stage?

31

AT THE end of February 1952 the 150th anniversary of Victor Hugo's birth was celebrated. Paul Eluard and Victor Hugo's grandson, the painter Jean Hugo, were invited to Moscow.

Jean Hugo is a delightful painter. He illustrated Eluard's poem, *En avril 1944 Paris respirait encore*, with translucent landscapes of the city, accomplished and at the same time ingenuous. Hugo brought some rare editions of his grandfather's works as a gift for our libraries, and when he spoke at meetings he always said he was happy to be spending these momentous days in the capital of the Soviet Union.

Although the invitation had been sent rather late Jean Hugo arrived in time and was present at the special meeting of the Institute of World Literature which inaugurated the festivities. But Eluard was not present. I went to the meeting, listened to the papers that were read and, on my return home, found Eluard there. Lyuba told me that the airport had rung up: 'A Frenchman has arrived, name of Eluard. No one here to meet him. He doesn't speak Russian but asks for Comrade Ehrenburg'. Lyuba told them to put Eluard in a taxi, to be driven to our flat. Eluard arrived ten minutes ahead of me. He said they had seemed to think he ought to be sent to the French embassy, but he had protested and the word 'Ehrenburg' was all they could understand. His wife would be arriving in two days' time, he said, as she had been out of Paris when he received the invitation. I was angry: why had no one informed us of his arrival? But he laughed: 'Why should they? I got here safely on my own'.

Eluard was very self-effacing. A member of the Resistance told me in 1946 that one day a tall man came to see him, gave the password and handed him a batch of leaflets. It was cold and he asked the visitor to sit down by the stove. 'Suddenly it dawned on me that I'd seen that face in some pre-war magazine. I asked tentatively: "Are you a poet?" "Yes". It was Eluard. I couldn't help saying: "You shouldn't take unnecessary risks. Someone else could have brought the leaflets". He was quite surprised: "Why someone else? We all take risks. And the comrades are worn out, they've been on their feet all day".'

Yves Farge went with Eluard to the partisan-held region of Greece in the summer of 1949, a few months before the end of the Resistance. Fierce fighting was going on: it was no longer a matter of defending Mount Grammos but human dignity. Farge told me that they sometimes had to trudge uphill for hours. Eluard never complained, never thought of stopping for a rest and when Farge suggested that they should sit down for an hour he was adamant: 'Let's go on with the fighters, we mustn't detain them'. Once he saw two girls carrying a heavy sack and took it from them to lug it along himself, refusing to give it up. I took down Farge's words: 'He never seemed to be conscious of the fact that he was a great poet. Perhaps that's why others could never forget it'.

Eluard spoke in the Hall of Columns and later at the club of a car factory. 'I find that the most difficult part is to come out on to the stage when everybody's looking at you,' he said. No sooner had the Victor Hugo celebrations ended than those for the centenary of Gogol's death began. Eluard spoke at the Bolshoy Theatre and elsewhere. This was followed by Fedin's jubilee and Eluard made a speech in his honour. Later he gave a talk on French poetry at the Writers' Club. Then he was invited to address students. After that, a press conference. Dominique Eluard said to me: 'Paul's always nervous when he has to speak in public'. I suggested that the programme should be curtailed, but custom would not allow that: if it is a jubilee there must be twenty-five speeches, if it is a banquet, there must be fifty toasts, for the country is large and there are many people in it who want to have their say.

One morning Eluard came to me in a great state saying that something most unpleasant had happened to Jean Hugo: he had been on the Sofiysky Embankment near the British embassy making a watercolour sketch of the Kremlin when a militiaman came up and confiscated his sketch-book. 'Jean has never had anything to do with politics, though he feels friendly towards your people. He's the chairman of the French Victor Hugo Jubilee Committee and it means something that he's come with me to Moscow. It's very awkward. Do you think they'll return his sketch-book?'

I rang up a comrade in a responsible position who said that the Frenchman had been making a sketch not only of the Kremlin but of the Defence Ministry as well 'which is quite impermissible'. A couple of hours later a messenger from the hotel brought me a copy of Eluard's

book illustrated by Jean Hugo, on the front page of which the artist had now added a water-colour of the Kremlin, showing the 'impermissible' top of the Defence Ministry building. Hugo enclosed a note to say that he was leaving and was sending this book to us as a memento. The water-colour was in the same style as Hugo's other works, tender and naive: walls, domes, snow. Any of this scene could have been photographed from the British embassy and would have been more accurate. I was extremely angry and telephoned again to say what I thought about the whole incident. In the evening the comrade rang back to inform me that it had been decided to return the sketch-book to Hugo: 'And we should like to ask you to try to placate him'. Reluctantly I went to find Hugo and, after some beating about the bush, blurted out: 'There's been a misunderstanding . . .' Hugo took me into the bathroom and said: 'You can rest assured that I won't say a word about this affair in France'. In an interview he gave in Paris he said how pleased he had been with his trip, how wonderfully he had been received, and that he had been able to see for himself how well loved Victor Hugo was in the Soviet Union. In the autumn of 1954 he wrote to say that he was working on illustrations to *The Thaw* which was to appear in the French journal *Pour la Défense de la Paix*. The drawings were full of poetry: a copse, clearings, lovers. Hugo had sensed rather than understood that much had changed in our way of life.

But to return to Eluard. I should like to convey some idea of this great poet whom I had met forty years earlier but had got to know and like only much later. I retain a vague memory of the young Surrealist, tall, lean, with a handsome face and a particularly attractive voice. He was criticizing a writer who was highly thought of in those days: 'He's not a man, he's a weasel who tries to persuade chickens that he'll save them from chicken troubles'. When his indignation was aroused he flushed deeply. At the time I did not know him well and it is only recently, after reading his early letters, that I realized how many enthusiasms and doubts we had in common, although he was five years younger than I. In his youth he had lung trouble and was sent to a sanatorium in Switzerland. There he met a Russian girl, Galya, and fell in love with her. The war broke out and Galya went back to Moscow. Paul worked in a field-hospital and was gassed. He wrote to Galya and in 1916 she came to Paris, where soon after they were married. With Galya's help he translated Blok's *Balaganchik* (The

Puppet Show). In one of his letters from the front he asked his mother to send his first book of poems to someone Galya knew – ‘the well-known Russian poetess Marina Tsvetayeva’.

Lyuba and I saw the year 1930 in at the house of the artist George Grosz in Berlin. Eluard was among the guests. In those days there were heated arguments among the Surrealists about whether Aragon was right or wrong. Eluard remained among the irreconcilables, but by nature he was gentle and could laugh and joke however difficult those years were for him.

Four years later I wrote an article about the magazine *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. It was a scathing but superficial piece of work. I had been infuriated by the Surrealists organizing discussions on the sex, character and potential behaviour of a glass bead or a scrap of velvet at a time when the fascists just across the Rhine were burning books and killing people. At the Anti-Fascist Congress of Writers, to which Eluard came to read a paper by André Breton, he cut me dead.

In the summer of 1937 as I was browsing among the new publications outside a bookshop in the boulevard St Germain I was aware of someone standing beside me; I looked up – it was Eluard. We both felt uncomfortable. He was the first to speak: ‘How are you? Picasso told me you were in Spain’. I replied that a week ago I had been at the Aragon front. As we moved off together, he asked how things were shaping there. I started to tell him but must have sounded rather stilted because he suddenly stopped: ‘I’ve got to go the other way’. When I recall this abortive meeting I realize how often I was deaf and blind.

In a French magazine that appeared in London during the war years I came across several poems that impressed me deeply by their beauty and humanity. They were signed Jean du Haut. It did flash across my mind that it might be Eluard. Not long after, one of the ‘Normandie’ airmen read the same poems to me as well as some others and said: ‘They’re by Paul Eluard’.

Then in the summer of 1946 we met in Paris and fell into each other’s arms. I knew from common friends that in the early thirties there had been changes in Eluard’s private life: he had married Nusch. Picasso showed me her portrait, she seemed very beautiful. Eluard’s poetry became less sombre. And then I met Nusch who was not only beautiful but full of charm; a gentle, fragile and at the same time

spirited creature. We spent an evening in some dark café. Paul and Nusch described life during the years of occupation. Afterwards we laughed and joked. Heavens, how bright the future seemed to us at the time!

Lyuba arrived from Moscow. Eluard invited us to his flat. We spent the best part of an hour searching for the house where he lived. He had written down the address but there was no such number. We walked up and down the long rue de la Chapelle, and though we did at last find the dark dreary house it was only thanks to a passer-by whom we asked and who hazarded: 'I expect you've got the old address, part of the street has been renamed – try the rue Marx-Dormoy'. I reproached Eluard for giving us the wrong street name. Nusch laughed: 'Paul doesn't like the new name. He says we've lived and shall go on living in the rue de la Chapelle. You see, it's a world of its own. He's known as *l'homme de la rue de la Chapelle*'.

We met again two years later in Wroclaw and talked far into the night. Again, we wandered about the ruins of Warsaw, sometimes with Picasso, at others alone together. Eluard had changed: he had sustained a great shock. Late in 1946, when he had gone to Switzerland for a few days, Nusch had suddenly died. His friends told me how grievously he had been affected by the loss. He himself said to me on one of those nights in Wroclaw: 'I felt I had one foot in the grave'.

Then came the Paris congress and more long talks. In Moscow, during the February and March of 1952, I saw him for the last time. If all the hours I spent with him were put together they would not amount to much, but the heart has its own chronometer, it seems. When he died I felt the loss not only of a great poet but of a close friend, a simple and unusual, a gentle and a brave man, a poet who wrote of love and was thought hard to understand but who nevertheless became dear to millions of readers.

I sometimes wonder if there will ever come a time when serious-minded adults stop contrasting one period of a poet's creative activity with another, chopping the man into little pieces, subjecting his life – with its searchings, its bereavements, its hopes, its inescapable tragedies – to a sort of farcical examination in which the examiner drones on: 'Ah, now that was a mistake – Yes, you've got that right – Wrong again! – That's better – You've seen the light at last – Well, we may pass you after all—'. What an infliction, what pettiness! Eluard was thirty in 1925 and therefore fifty in 1945. It is not just that a man's

hair turns grey at the temples and that his hands have become unsteady, but how can a man, before whom the future is still wrapped in mist, understand and feel what at the end of his life's span will become for him not elementary truths that he has learnt by rote, but his own experience, his own sweat, tears and losses? And is it only poets who change? Does not life itself change? For Eluard the long years of Surrealism were not a 'mistake', to be overlooked for the sake of what came after, they were years of his life and years of his poetry and without them he could not have become the author of his later works.

At the front, when still a very young man, he began a poem with the words: 'The azure abandoned me and I kindled a fire'. He wrote about the same things during the Resistance years and again before he died: about night and about fire. And always he wrote about love. For the young soldier at the front it was Galya, for the mature poet it was Nusch, in the last years it was Dominique. But Eluard's poems do not chronicle his love-life; they do not exalt a Petrarchian Laura or some other woman, they are poems about love, and all in love will read them as an expression of their own emotions. Poetical genius does not reside only in an exceptional gift for words; it springs from exceptional depths and acuity of feeling which enable 'self-expression' to become the expression of the poet's contemporaries and of many later generations.

One day in Wroclaw Eluard talked to me about his poem *Liberté*. It consists of a number of quatrains each ending in the words: 'I write your name'. ('On my demolished shelters / On my crumbled beacons / On the walls of my tedium / I write your name.') Eluard said he had written these verses to Nusch and had ended them with the words: 'I was born to know you / To name you / Liberty'.

He had a remarkable quality: this allegedly obscure, even hermetic poet not only understood everyone, he felt for everyone. 'I suddenly realized,' he said, 'that I had to end with a name, and after the words "to name you", I wrote "Liberty".' This was in 1942 when the loved one was for everybody the same.

Eluard's poetry was always considered difficult and he was spoken of as a 'poet for the few'. Yet when airmen scattered his poems over the towns of occupied France they meant more to people than propaganda leaflets, although Eluard had made no concessions, nor had he tried to adapt himself in any way: his wartime poems are just as 'difficult' as those he wrote before and after. This is yet another proof that

'accessibility' is relative; that the words of a genuine poet are far more intelligible to millions of people than are stodgy homilies by literary critics.

The complexity of Eluard's poetry lies in its terseness, its difficulty in its simplicity. It is practically untranslatable because so much depends on the shape of the word, its sound, its associations. (Nezval, Alberti, Tuwim, Hikmet and Neruda read his poems in the original and their affection for the man grew out of their appreciation for the solidity, the reality of his poetry.) It is hard to define exactly in what the power of his poetry lies: the outward pointers are lacking, he does not use rhyme or metre, there are no uncommon words, there is no rich imagery. In the poem *Gabriel Péri* are the lines: 'There are words that help us to live / And they are simple words / The word warmth and the word trust / love, justice and the word freedom / The word child and the word kindness / And some names of flowers and some names of fruits / The word courage and the word discover / And the word brother and the word comrade / And some names of countries of villages / And some names of women of friends . . .'

His verses seem to quiver, weightless, like the shadows of leaves or drops of morning dew, yet they live on in one's memory, they border the path of life like old plane trees or stone statues.

Eluard loved life. Picasso was only one of many artists, all very different, who illustrated his books: Max Ernst and Valentine Hugo, Léger and Salvador Dali, Chagall and Chirico. I do not share his admiration for all these painters but I understand what he saw in their work: blueprints for poems, the visible world of his dreams. In his poetry, however, he did not try to mould shapes or render colours in words; he believed in the magic of words as such and did not deviate from it into either visual imagery or rhetoric.

He was deeply devoted to Picasso. Their friendship lasted a quarter of a century and nothing could shake or even cool it. Eluard's lines stand under Picasso's *Guernica*. The poems he wrote about the great artist, Eluard collected in a volume called *Pablo Picasso*. Outwardly the two men seemed to be at opposite poles: a devil and an infant — though that kind of characterization is more fitting for examiners and classifiers to whom the world of art is closed. The devil can be kindly and even openhearted, while the infant had been in hell and was profoundly experienced. In spite of appearances, in spite of differences in age and profession, these two were phenomena of the same kind and

when Picasso says: 'Paul told me that', there is such tenderness in his voice that it gives one a pang.

Eluard was so good and so modest that I do not think he had any personal enemies. In 1942 he joined the French Communist Party and remained true to it till his death. He died at a time when hostility to Communism was still at its height; the striking fact is that the power of his poetry, its humanity and generous spirit disarmed his political opponents. To be sure, the authorities tried to prohibit his funeral procession, but that was a cold war reflex, the action of automata rather than of sentient men.

Many years have passed since Eluard's death, but his influence continues to grow and no one now argues about him any more; his poetry has outlived both his own history and world events.

Yet I have not mentioned the most compelling feature of his poetry. It is human kindness. There are many remarkable poets capable of deep and sensitive feeling, who can express torments or delights, but who have not human kindness. It is a quality rare enough in people as a whole and in poets very rare indeed. For Eluard the happiness of others was a necessity to his own happiness and this was not an intellectual response but arose spontaneously from his very nature. When he wrote of personal happiness, he was writing about the happiness of everyone: 'We walk, the two of us, holding hands. It seems to us that we are at home everywhere, under a friendly tree, under the black sky, under all roofs, at the fireside, in the street emptied by the hot sun, when passers-by look curiously at us, among sensible people and among eccentrics, among grown-ups and among children. There is nothing mysterious about love. Everyone can understand us and all lovers feel that they are our guests'. This was written a short time before his death. He must have been walking with Dominique over the hills of the Dordogne or through Pushkin Square in Moscow. His impulse was to shower gifts on everyone. He fought and he risked his life again and again, not because he had decided on this particular line of action but because he could not do otherwise.

He spent one of his last evenings in Moscow with us. His hands were shaking more than usual but he was full of jokes, and then he fell silent. Lyuba was talking to Dominique. He turned to me and said: 'I was thinking about that young worker, you remember, who pushed his way into the green-room after the recital. He said: "I want to write poetry too, but I'm afraid I shan't succeed. My head's full of

words all the time, it buzzes, but I'm afraid to write''. What's bitter is that the thing you have in your mind is always better than what you do. And that goes for life as well as poetry'.

I made a note of those words. When we parted we expected to meet again in Vienna that December. I was glad that he had good, strong, considerate Dominique at his side. Eight months later, on a cold foggy morning, I heard: 'Yesterday the French poet Paul Eluard died'. Later Dominique told me that in the morning he had read in the papers that the Rosenbergs, wrongfully condemned to death in America, had been refused a re-hearing of their case. Paul had said: 'If only they could be saved'. Fifteen minutes later he called out to Dominique: by the time she reached him his heart had stopped. He was not quite fifty-seven. As I write it seems as though it had happened only yesterday. There is no stronger tie than that linking people who have left the mountain pass behind and are descending a dark, steep path in the twilight.

32

LOOKING BACK, the year 1952 seems to me very long and colourless, probably because of the way I was then living. *The Ninth Wave* was coming out in serial form and the reviewers praised it, but I myself felt the book was a failure and did not want to go on writing. The intervals between travelling about for the peace movement and my work as a deputy left me enough leisure to reflect on my future as a writer. One autumn day I recorded in my notebook: 'It might be wiser to stop writing altogether. In three months' time I shall be sixty-two, and that is not an age to wait and see. At least in the peace movement I can do something useful'.

In October the 19th Party Congress was held. At its close Stalin made a brief, striking speech. Malenkov referred to literature in his report; he regretted that we had no Gogols or Shchedrins and said that the writer's ideological attitude is demonstrated by whether his characters are typical or not. A Leningrad writer said to me: 'One was allowed to write satires on house-managers even before we were reminded of Gogol and Shchedrin. But if you aim at someone higher they say at once "that's not typical". It would be interesting to know how "typicality" is to be determined – perhaps by statistics?'

I have been looking through the files of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*: everything appeared most satisfactory. The paper noted that Grossman's novel *Za Pravoye Delo* (For the Just Cause) had appeared in *Novy Mir*, but the reviewers ignored it. They approved of the new variant of Fadeyev's *Molodaya Gvardia* (The Young Guard) and were polite about Kochetov's novel *Zhurbiny* (The Zhurbins). The paper deplored the scant attention given to 'Stalin's work of genius revolutionizing linguistics'. The 'pseudo-science' of cybernetics was denounced. Writers were chided gently, almost paternally. Jubilees were celebrated: the sixtieth birthdays of Paustovsky and Fedin, the fiftieth of Nazim Hikmet and Kaverin. Literary functions were organized for them, addresses were presented, with embraces and, of course, good wishes for 'further creative successes'. Vinokurov's book was published and won moderate praise. One of the

fat journals had printed a poem by Martynov for which the editorial board was soundly slated. Colourless poems, all very much alike, appeared under the unfamiliar names of new young poets; under one of them I now noticed that of Y. Yevtushenko. Turning over the pages, which have not yet had time to yellow, you begin to feel that the editors were hard put to it to fill them.

After the Radishchev celebrations had been dealt with, there was the fiftieth anniversary of Zola's death and then Mamin-Sibiryak's centenary.

In April an international economic conference was held in Moscow. There I met Lord Boyd-Orr, an old English pacifist of great culture and moral integrity. He expressed hopes for the collaboration of the two worlds and admiration for Gandhi and Einstein.

Apart from economists, several big industrialists and a number of smaller ones attended the conference, all hoping for Soviet orders. I remember an amusing episode. There was a telephone call from the secretary of the conference: 'What do the French initials A.P.T. stand for?' I racked my brains but could not find a clue. Then a letter was forwarded to me: Apt turned out to be the name of a small town in Vaucluse, and the writer was a certain Chauvin, a manufacturer of ochre. According to him the French manufacturers had sold eight thousand tons of ochre annually to Russia before the war and he had come to the economic conference in the hope of reviving these exports. He turned out to be a lively, pleasant southerner, a member of the French peace movement and an incurable romantic. He went to see the Committee for the Defence of Peace in Kropotkin Street. He was delighted by the people he met there but the peeling façade of the house made him say over and over again: 'You absolutely must have ochre'. He had brought samples with him from other Apt industries: crystallized fruits and lavender water. The fruits tasted good, the lavender smelt delicious but neither these wares nor the ochre appealed to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. A Belgian who had been given a large order for women's underwear was triumphant, but Chauvin left empty-handed, though full of affection for our people. He wrote to me several times suggesting that Soviet actors should take part in the carnival at Apt; in short, he remained an unpractical dreamer.

Life went on. The people worked. New factories were being built. Teachers taught the three R's to children who have now grown up, who today work or study, who think and argue. Young people were

reading Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky. Every night on the stages of a thousand theatres Hamlet spoke about the recorder and falsehood, Chekhov's characters ate their hearts out, and the immortal Khlestakov lied for all he was worth. The museums were permanently crowded. Falling into conversation with strangers I realized how the intellectual awareness of the 'average' man had grown.

In Prague that autumn a group of leading Communists was put on trial. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* called them 'toads defiling a crystal spring' who 'hoped to transform Czechoslovakia into a foreign branch of Wall Street ruled by American monopolists, bourgeois nationalists, Zionists and all manner of riff-raff steeped in crime.' (In the spring of 1963 the Supreme Court of the Czechoslovak Republic revoked the sentences and rehabilitated the condemned men.) Of course I did not foresee what was to come but the Prague trial put me on the alert.

Negotiations for a cease-fire in Korea had been opened as early as the spring of 1951. After endless discussions the parties agreed on sixty points, the only one still in dispute being the method for repatriating prisoners of war. At the General Assembly of the United Nations Vyshinsky and Acheson made long speeches. Everyone realized that the conflict would not be decided by armed force, yet the fighting continued, and precisely in the region which, according to one of the sixty points agreed, was to become a neutral zone.

Fighting also continued in Indo-China. The cold war went on unabated. Certain American Senators referred to the operations in Korea as 'the start of the Third World War', and said that the war would be a prolonged one which should end in the 'complete annihilation of Communism'. In France governments changed with bewildering speed, strikes broke out, Communists and trade unionists were arrested. In Greece executions continued. I gazed long at the photograph of Beloyannis who had been shot; he held a carnation in his hand and smiled.

The year seemed somehow quiet and stifling. The events to come were being gestated, slowly as yet, but quite clearly enough for even the most inveterate optimists to hold their tongues.

I was busy preparing for the Congress of the Peoples for Peace which entailed two trips to Scandinavia, a visit to Berlin and several weeks in Vienna.

Joliot-Curie and other leaders of the movement wanted the Congress of the Peoples to be wider and more representative than previous

peace congresses. In a letter to the Italian Liberal Nitti he guaranteed the delegates full freedom to express their point of view. Mistrust, however, prevented many waverers from coming to Vienna. But, given the circumstances of 1952, it can be claimed that, on the whole, the congress was a success. Among the speakers were the former German Chancellor Dr Wirth, the Italian Catholic Party deputy Terranova, the Italian Nitti, supporters of Vargas from Brazil and of Perón from Argentina, members of the Indian Congress Party, a representative of the majority party the Iranian Majlis, some British trade unionists, nationalists from Morocco (friends of Bourguiba), the writer Jean-Paul Sartre, an observer from the organization that advocated World Government, and pacifists of every shade.

Unlike at the Paris and Warsaw congresses, speakers who criticized Soviet policy were heard out quietly and even applauded at the end; some of these speeches drew attention to Vyshinsky's excessively belligerent attitude, to the refusal to compromise and to the undertones of the Prague trials. The speeches I remember best are those by Elin Appel, the Italian Catholic Alessandra Piaggio and the Swedish writer Erik Blomberg.

Of course, as at Warsaw, certain speakers were greeted by everybody rising to their feet, and there was singing and waving of handkerchiefs at the last session which closed at 3 o'clock in the morning. However, the atmosphere was both more businesslike and more orderly than at the Warsaw congress. The opening speech by Joliot-Curie more or less set the tone for the proceedings. For the first time a great deal was said about peaceful coexistence and cultural ties. Fadeyev was unwell, and the Soviet delegation was headed by Korneichuk whose face was wreathed in smiles.

The text of the Appeal to the Peoples contained no recriminations; it demanded an immediate cessation of all military operations, the recognition of the right of all nations to independence and the necessity for general disarmament; in short it was rather like some of the resolutions which seven or eight years later were unanimously approved by the United Nations.

At the end of the congress a banquet was given in a large hall seating two thousand people. There were few speeches and plenty of Austrian wine, light but deceptive. Everybody became very gay. Towards morning someone read or rather shouted the names of the peace prize winners from a list just received from Moscow: 'Yves Farge, Saifuddin

Kitchlew, Paul Robeson . . . ' I was clapping when I suddenly heard the name 'Ilya Ehrenburg'. I was more embarrassed than pleased. We had never awarded prizes to our own people. And, anyhow, why me and not Fadeyev or Korneichuk? People came up to me, clinked glasses and embraced me. Sereni said in my ear: 'It's a good thing they've given you the prize. Particularly now'. I asked what he meant but he did not answer.

Two days later we left for Moscow by train. One coach was reserved for Soong Ching Ling and the Chinese delegates, in the others were the Soviet delegation and our guests – Kitchlew, Amado, James Endicott and Jorge Zalamea. In those days trains were slow. We started in the morning and reached Budapest only towards evening. We had no money and had been given nothing for the journey except flowers. Korneichuk, who was in the next compartment, alternately declared that he was ready to eat his travelling companions and pictured how they would feed us in Budapest where the train was due to stop for two hours. Rákosi and other important comrades who came to meet us took us to the VIP waiting-room. 'Now they'll give us some goulash,' Korneichuk whispered. But all we were given was black coffee and biscuits. After debating with himself Korneichuk announced out loud: 'We've eaten nothing since the morning'. The Hungarians flung themselves into action; there was no restaurant at the station, but half an hour later they brought us some sausages which were good though rather small. We had our first proper meal the next morning at the Soviet frontier where the train stopped for some five hours. Two days later I was in Moscow. On the journey I tried to interpret Sereni's words: did he know something which I did not? The more I thought about it the less I was able to make of it and I yawned nervously.

Five days later we saw the New Year in with Irina, Lidin and the Saviches. I had had time to see some of my friends and ask them what news there was. They could tell me only trivial gossip. I felt uneasy in my mind but could not say why.

On 13th January the newspapers were brought to us in the country at noon. I rather apathetically unfolded *Pravda*: 'Towards a New Advance in the Oil Industry', 'Decline in French Foreign Trade'. Suddenly on the back page I saw: 'Arrest of a Group of Saboteur Doctors'. TASS reported that a group of doctors responsible for the deaths of Zhdanov and Shcherbakov had been arrested. They had confessed that they had intended to kill Marshals Vassilevsky,

Govorov, Konev and others. The paper said that the majority of those arrested were agents of 'the international Jewish bourgeois-nationalistic organization "Joint",' who had received instructions through Doctor Shimeliovich and 'the Jewish bourgeois nationalist Mikhoëls'. The list of those arrested contained the names of nine well-known medical men, six of whom were Jews.

I went to Moscow where I tried to find out what had happened. Some said that the arrest of the doctors had begun two months ago; others claimed that there had been a consultation to which Stalin's doctors had been invited, whereupon they were arrested. Everyone said there was chaos in the hospitals, many patients regarding the doctors as dangerous and refusing to take any medicines. The agronomist who had had the talk about cows with Sartre had gone on holiday to Yalta. He came back before his leave was up because, as he told me, his wife had got into a panic and said: 'Let's get out of the sanatorium at once, they'll poison us here'. I heard a woman doctor say: 'All day yesterday I had to swallow pills, powders, a dozen medicines for a dozen diseases – the patients were afraid I was a "plotter"'. In the Tishin market-place a drunk shouted: 'The Jews tried to poison Stalin'.

I have said that our people had matured spiritually, but even the 'thinking reed' stops thinking at times; one can be a philosopher and yet feel alarm if a black cat crosses one's path. I am by no means imputing to everyone this unreasoned fear. The last cholera riots were in 1893. Pogroms, too, ceased with the end of the Civil War. But if one were to explore deeply enough the spiritual jungle of many quite rational people, one would find traces of mistrust and suspicion. Of course, people of this sort do not pay attention to the gossip of old women in the market, but it was the investigating authorities who issued the information about the doctor-murderers. People recalled the 1938 trial when it had been established that his doctors had killed Gorky. Now the physicians had a more cunning technique: they gave a wrong diagnosis and brought about the death of the patient by wrong treatment. I have often noticed that people combine a respect for the science of medicine with a fear of medical men, of the doctor treating them: he might make a mistake or overlook something. If he has sold himself to one's enemies, he may even kill and do so with impunity. Grigorian asked me to come and see him to talk about the prize-giving, which ceremony was due to be held on 27th January. 'It would be a good thing,' he said, 'if you were to say a word about

the criminal doctors.' I felt outraged and said I had not asked for the prize, that I was ready to relinquish it forthwith, but that nothing would induce me to speak about the doctors. Grigorian tried to pacify me: 'It isn't a directive, I was only suggesting it'.

On 24th January, the anniversary of Lenin's death, the papers published a photograph of him and, underneath, a decree awarding the Order of Lenin to a certain woman doctor 'for services to the government in unmasking the doctor-murderers'.

At the ceremony where I received the prize, congratulatory speeches were made by Tikhonov, Surkov, Aragon, Anna Seghers and the Colombian writer Jorge Zalamea. Then it was my turn to speak. I was brief. I said: 'No matter what his national origin, a Soviet citizen is first and foremost a patriot of his country, and he is a true internationalist, an opponent of racial and national discrimination, a fervent believer in the brotherhood of man, a fearless defender of peace'. These words were dictated by what was going on, and I came back again to what had been tormenting me: 'On this solemn and festive occasion in the white hall of the Kremlin I want to pay tribute to those fighters for peace who are being persecuted, tortured and hounded; I want to call to mind the dark night of prisons, of interrogations, of trials, and the courage of so many and so many'. It was as still as death in the Sverdlov Hall. Lyuba told me afterwards that when I mentioned prisons the people sitting near her held their breath. The next morning my speech appeared in the press with some amendments: to my words about persecutions they had tacked on 'by the forces of reaction', in case the readers might, rightly, take them as referring to Beria's victims.

The papers published an article about the letters of congratulation received by the woman doctor who 'had unmasked the murderers in white coats'. Many of the letters eulogized this 'Russian woman', this 'true Russian soul'.

However, it was in the French paper *Ce Soir*, long under the editorship of Jean-Richard Bloch, that I found the most outrageous pronouncements in articles written by the well-known journalist Pierre Hervé, who was at that time a Communist. I can quite see that a French Communist would give credence to the Soviet investigation authorities and defend them against political enemies, but Hervé surpassed everyone and everything: his articles were not unlike the famous forgery concocted under the Second Empire, *The Protocols of the Elders*

of Zion. When I first read them these articles staggered me. Two years later, when legality was restored in our country, Hervé left the Communist Party and published a book – he even sent me a copy touchingly inscribed – in which, among other things, he expressed his indignation at the ‘doctors’ case’ without any mention of his own contribution.

A sharply-worded review of Grossman’s novel appeared in *Pravda*. Immediately all the other papers came down on it too.

Things continued to develop. February proved very difficult for me, but it is premature to describe what I went through. In the eyes of millions of people I was a writer who could go to Stalin and tell him that I disagreed with him on this or that matter. But in actual fact I was nothing but a ‘cog’ or a ‘screw’, like any of my readers. I wrote a letter of protest, but fate, not my protest, now settled matters.

It was a cold wintry day. To keep myself occupied and ward off unhappy thoughts for a few hours I was working on a translation of Villon when suddenly Ivan Petrovich, the caretaker, came in: ‘They’ve just announced on the radio that Stalin’s ill, paralysed. His life’s in danger’.

I remember my journey to Moscow. There was a lot of snow. Children were rolling in the snowdrifts. I tried to think out what would happen to us all now but was quite unable to. Like so many of my compatriots at that moment, I was in a state of shock.

33

‘AT NINE fifty in the evening . . .’

The medical bulletins spoke of leucocytes, of collapse, of intermittent arrhythmia. We had long lost sight of the fact that Stalin was mortal. He had become an all-powerful and remote deity. And now the deity had died of a cerebral haemorrhage. It seemed incredible.

The Moscow building in which I live has its entrance in a lane that runs between Gorky Street and Pushkin Street. In order to get into either of these streets I had to have the permission of a militia officer which entailed long explanations and the inspection of documents. Great lorries stood blocking the way and, when the officer gave me leave, I climbed on to a lorry and jumped off it on the other side, only to find that, fifty paces further on, I was again stopped and had to go through the same performance.

The writers held their memorial meeting at the Film Actors’ Theatre in Vorovsky Street. Everyone was distressed and confused and spoke incoherently, not at all like professional men of letters but more as if they were inarticulate mathematicians or workers speaking in public for the first time. There were many speeches. I spoke too, but I have no idea what I said – no doubt the same as the others.

On the next day we went to the Hall of Columns. I did my turn of standing watch in the guard of honour with other writers. Stalin, embalmed and covered with flowers and medals, looked solemn and showed no traces of the condition reported in the medical bulletins. People filed past the bier; many were weeping, women held up children to see; loud sobbing mingled with the funeral music.

I saw many people in tears in the street. There was some shouting as the crowd pressed towards the Hall of Columns. A rumour spread that people had been trampled to death in Trubny Square. Detachments of militia were brought in from Leningrad. I do not think there has ever been such a funeral in all history.

I felt no particular pity for the god who had died from a stroke at the age of seventy-three, not like a god but like any other human being. Yet I felt alarm: what would happen now? I feared the worst. Over

and over again in these books I have used the phrase 'the thinking reed'. Now I know that it can be very difficult for people to remain lucid in their thinking. The cult of personality had not converted me to unthinking faith but it had swayed my judgments: I could not see the future of the country as other than bound up with what was daily called 'the wisdom of our leader of genius'.

I had never spoken to Stalin (except for one telephone conversation on the eve of the war, which I have described). I had seen him from a distance at formal meetings, receptions and sessions of the Supreme Soviet. On one occasion I found myself standing close to him; this was at a reception given for Mao Tse-tung in Moscow. I had been faintly surprised by the strict control at the entrance, as though this were the Kremlin rather than the Metropole Hotel. The hall was so crowded when I got inside that I made no attempt to move forward. The place was buzzing with voices. Suddenly there was dead silence. Turning my head I saw Stalin. He was not like his portraits. An old man, short of stature, with a face that looked pitted by the years, a low forehead, a pair of sharp, lively eyes. He glanced curiously round the hall in which he had probably never set foot for a quarter of a century. Then there was an ovation and he was piloted to where the Chinese were standing. It all happened so quickly that I hardly had time to take a good look at him.

It would be too much to say that I liked Stalin, but for a long time I believed in him and I feared him. When I talked about him I, like everybody else, called him 'The Boss'. In the same way Jews in the past never pronounced the name of God. They could not really have loved Jehovah: he was not only omnipotent but pitiless and unjust. He heaped every calamity on the head of virtuous Job – killed his wife and his children, struck him down with leprosy – merely to demonstrate that an innocent man, rotting alive among the ashes and abandoned by all, could still glorify the wisdom of Jehovah. God laid a wager with the devil and God won. But the loser was Job.

In a previous volume of these memoirs I undertook to revert to the subject of Stalin and to try to discover and sum up the reasons for our errors. Like many actions in my life, that undertaking was too rash. I have started writing this chapter several times, crossing out and tearing up as I went, and in the end had to acknowledge that I could not make good my word. To be sure, I know far more now than I did in March 1953. But I realize that I still do not know enough to make

deductions and draw conclusions, and that even the things I do know I do not wholly understand. It is beyond me to give a portrait of Stalin. I never knew him personally. There is no doubt that he was a complex personality and the accounts of people who did know him are contradictory. I ought never to have undertaken to go outside the limits of personal reminiscence, into the sphere of history and philosophy. I must therefore confine myself to recording the feelings and thoughts I entertained in March 1953 and to such reflections as are directly relevant to my standpoint as a writer – of all people the most deeply concerned with the human conscience and an awareness of reality.

The deification of Stalin did not come about suddenly nor did it stem from an explosion of popular feeling. Stalin organized it himself, systematically and over a long period. On his instructions currency was given to a fictitious version of history in which Stalin played a part that did not correspond to the facts; painters produced vast canvases depicting scenes of the eve of the Revolution, October, and the early years of the Soviet Republic in each of which Stalin was shown at Lenin's side; the newspapers denigrated other Bolsheviks who had been Lenin's closest associates in his lifetime. The hailing of Stalin as a 'genius' and 'the most wise' preceded mass repressions. I have related how disturbed I felt in 1935 by the frenetic applause and hysterical cries which greeted Stalin's appearance at the Stakhanovite conference. At the time I tried to tell myself that I did not understand the feelings of the people, that I was an intellectual who had, moreover, long been out of touch with Russian life. Later I grew accustomed to the ovations and the idolatrous epithets and ceased to notice them.

To the Catholics St Peter is the stone on which the Church is founded, the keeper of the keys to paradise, but to me he is the hero of poetic legend who thrice denied his teacher and atoned for his weakness by martyrdom. But at St Peter's in Rome, looking at his statue, I forgot all legends as I saw where the bronze of Peter's foot had been worn away by the lips of worshippers. Faith, like fear, and some other emotions, is infectious. Although I had been reared on nineteenth century free-thinking, and had written *Julio Jurenito*, I proved not to be immune to the epidemic of the Stalin cult. The faith of others did not set my heart on fire but at times it weighed on me, it prevented me from looking steadily at what was happening. In 1957, recalling the past, I wrote: 'Faith can be both spectacles and blinkers.

Faith moves mountains. I am a man, not a mountain. Faith is not my sister. I have seen the grey stone worn away by the tremor of lips. Faith raises the dead. I am a man, not a corpse. I have seen people go blind, I have seen them living among ashes, I have seen the earth in convulsion, I have seen the sky in ashes. I believe that I do not believe'.

I was with an Andalusian detachment whose men fought to the death; they called it the 'Stalin Battalion'. During the war years I had often heard the cry 'For the Fatherland, for Stalin!' The letters of many Italian and French heroes of the Resistance written on the eve of their execution ended with the words 'Long live Stalin!' On his seventieth birthday a Frenchwoman sent Stalin the cap worn by her daughter who had been tortured to death by the Gestapo. Poets, whose integrity is beyond question – such as Eluard, Jean-Richard Bloch, Miguel Hernández, Nezval – extolled Stalin. He became a banner, an immaculate godhead.

A struggle was in progress and no one could be above the battle. For our enemies, too, Stalin ceased to be human; when they spoke of him, Hitler and Goebbels, Forrestal and McCarthy raved hysterically as at a Black Mass.

In the thirties I saw what fascism was. The resistance of the Spanish people was broken; the fascist dictators helped Franco, the Western democracies hypocritically declared the principle of non-intervention, and only a handful of Soviet army men fought on the Republican side. Munich was an attempt to form an anti-Soviet coalition: Chamberlain and Daladier hoped that Hitler would go east. When the 'phony war' began, the rulers of France were less concerned to fight the Wehrmacht than their own Communists. A few months before the fall of France her military leaders were busy organizing an expeditionary force to fight the Red Army in Finland. When Hitler attacked the Soviet Union certain politicians in America and Britain were overjoyed, not only because the Reds would weaken the Wehrmacht but also because in the long run Hitler would destroy the Reds. No sooner had the Second World War ended than there was talk of a third. Fanatical adherents of capitalism, businessmen who saw themselves as crusaders and trigger-happy militarists willy-nilly helped to consolidate the Stalin cult.

I did not readily find the clue to the role of 'the most wise'. If even today I am not fully informed, in 1937 I knew only of isolated crimes.

Like many other people, I tried to absolve Stalin in my own eyes; I ascribed the mass repressions to a struggle within the Party, to Yezhov's sadism, to misinformation, to the moral climate of the time.

Stalin was a man of great intelligence and greater cunning. He often spoke out as a defender of justice who wished to put an end to arbitrary methods. It is enough to recall his famous words about 'dizzy with success' and 'a son is not responsible for his father'. After the unbridled violence of the *yezhovshchina* he publicly deplored that in a particular town several honest Communists had been expelled from the Party and that in another an innocent man had been arrested. Ten years later, at the height of the campaign against the 'cosmopolitans', he condemned the practice of disclosing pen-names. He invariably spoke of the necessity to spare people. Saryan told me that, when he was receiving an Armenian delegation, Stalin asked after the poet Charents and said that he should be left alone, yet a few months later Charents was arrested and put to death.

Stalin apparently had a way of charming those to whom he talked. Barbusse wrote: 'It can be said that in no one have Lenin's thoughts and words been embodied better than in Stalin'. After meeting him Romain Rolland said: 'He is amazingly human'. Feuchtwanger thought himself a sceptic, an old stager. Stalin must have been laughing up his sleeve when he told Feuchtwanger how much he disliked having his portrait everywhere, but the old stager believed him.

Suritz, and later Litvinov and Maisky, said that the pact with Hitler had been absolutely necessary: Stalin succeeded in confounding the plans for a Western coalition intent upon the destruction of the Soviet Union. However, he did not put the two years' grace so won to good use in strengthening our defences: I heard this both from army men and from diplomats. I have already said that Stalin, over-suspicious and seeing potential 'enemies of the people' in his closest associates, had unaccountably put his trust in Ribbentrop's signature. The Nazis caught us unprepared. At first Stalin was at a loss, he did not dare tell the country about the attack himself but entrusted the task to Molotov; later, seeing that in spite of the heroism of the Soviet soldiers the fascists were swiftly advancing on Moscow, Stalin addressed the people: we were raised to the status of the god's 'brothers and sisters'. He soon collected himself, and Harry Hopkins was impressed by his calm demeanour; he stayed on in half-empty Moscow and during the difficult summer of 1942 tried to remain in the background: his name

seldom appeared in the press. The 'cult' was restored immediately after the crushing of the Germans on the Volga. It was the people who had won the victory, it was the people who fought, who built the factories, dug the canals, made the roads, and who, living in a state of semi-starvation, never lost heart. But the papers claimed the victory for the 'strategist of genius'.

The post-war years were hard, and I was not living in Paris but in Moscow. I had time to learn a good deal. In March 1953 I realized that Stalin, in his nature and in the methods he favoured, resembled the brilliant politicians of the Italian Renaissance. I remembered the Bolsheviks who had surrounded Lenin in Paris; of these probably only Lunacharsky and Alexandra Kollontay were lucky enough to die in their beds. Among those who perished were my close friends and no one will ever persuade me that Vsevolod Meyerhold, Semyon Chlenov, Isaak Babel or Nikolay Bukharin was a traitor. Eisenstein described a meeting with Stalin who, after saying that one ought to exalt the figure of Ivan the Terrible in the eyes of the people, added: 'Peter didn't lop off enough heads'. I am not now writing of either Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great; I simply want to explain why I did not love Stalin.

Never in my life have I considered silence a virtue, and, writing about myself and my friends in these memoirs, I have admitted how difficult it was at times to remain silent.

When I got back to Moscow from Spain at the end of 1937 I saw what was going on in people's homes and minds. I tried to reassure myself: there must be many things that Stalin did not know. Indeed, I think it is true that Stalin did not know about young Natasha Stolyarova, or about the wife of the painter Shukhayev, or about Semyon Lyandres: if he had read the lists of all his victims he would have had time for nothing else. But even then I realized that the orders for the liquidation of old Bolsheviks and of outstanding commanders of the Red Army whom I had met in Spain could have come only from Stalin himself. Six months later, on returning to Barcelona, I could not tell anyone what I had seen and heard in Moscow.

Why, when I was in Paris, did I not write *I Cannot Be Silent*? After all, *Posledniye Novosti* (Latest News)¹ or *Le Temps* would have been only too glad to print an article of that kind, even if I had

¹ Russian émigré daily published by Milyukov in Paris.

declared my faith in the future of Communism. Leo Tolstoy did not believe that a revolution would do away with all evil, but he certainly had no wish to defend tsarist Russia: on the contrary, he branded her crimes for all the world to see. My attitude towards the Soviet Union was different. I knew that our people, contending with hardships and setbacks, continued to follow the difficult path of the October Revolution. Silence for me was not a cult but a curse, and in a book about my life I cannot leave this unsaid.

A member of the French Resistance told me in 1946 that his partisan group was commanded by a brutal and arbitrary man who shot his comrades, burnt down peasants' houses and suspected everyone of treason or cowardice. 'I couldn't tell anyone about it,' he said. 'It would have meant dealing a blow to the whole Resistance. The Pétainists would have used it.'

Yes, I knew about many crimes but it was not in my power to stop them. Yet why make the point? Far more influential and better informed people than I were unable to stop them. On 2nd July 1956 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union published a Resolution *On Overcoming the Cult of the Individual and Its Consequences*. It contains the following lines: 'Immediately after Stalin's death the Leninist core of the Central Committee took the path of vigorous struggle against the cult of the individual and its grave consequences. The question may arise: Why then had these people not come out openly against Stalin and removed him from leadership? In the prevailing conditions this could not be done'. The Resolution goes on to say that '... Stalin was guilty of many unlawful actions but his authority was such that any opposition to him in these circumstances would not have been understood by the people, and it was not at all a matter of lack of personal courage.'

Stalin probably regarded himself to the end of his days as a Communist, as Lenin's disciple and heir; he not only said but believed that he was leading the people to a noble future and that to achieve this no means should be disdained. The comparison with the Italian Renaissance is very much in order. Macchiavelli taught that to create a powerful State all means were fair: poison, denunciations, assassination; he advised the Prince to combine in his person the courage of the lion with the cunning of the fox, and to be as wise as a man and as savage as a beast of prey. To the Medici or the Borgias such advice was no doubt useful; to a Communist it is unacceptable.

The old argument about whether ends justify means seems to me abstract. The end is not a signpost pointing along the road but something quite real in itself; it is present reality, not the dreams of tomorrow but the actions of today: the end must dictate not only political strategy but morality too. One cannot establish justice by consciously committing unjust acts; one cannot work for equality by turning people into 'cogs' and 'screws' and oneself into a mythical deity. The means always affects the end, it dignifies or distorts it. I think that after the 20th and 22nd Party Congresses this has become clear to everyone, except perhaps to some foreign dogmatists who, when they speak of their own stainless purity, blasphemously set Stalin's name with Lenin's.

Like millions of my compatriots I felt, after reading the report of the 20th Congress, that a load had been lifted from my heart. Although Stalin's methods were abandoned immediately after his death, our people and the rest of the world had to know the bitter truth: reason and conscience exacted it. We learnt about the errors of the past. This past included many self-sacrificing deeds and victories of the Soviet people, but in speaking of them it would be more correct to say 'in spite of Stalin' rather than 'thanks to Stalin', for only too often he applied his statesman's intellect and exceptional will power to actions that ran counter to the ideas he invoked and wounded the conscience of honest men.

But to return to the March days. During the night Stalin's name was added to Lenin's on the mausoleum in Red Square. Malenkov, Beria and Molotov spoke at the funeral. The speeches were all alike, though Malenkov called for a further intensification of vigilance 'in the spirit of irreconcilability and firmness in the struggle against internal and external enemies', while Beria, whose name was feared by all, promised Soviet citizens that he would 'solicitously and untiringly protect their rights, laid down in the Stalin Constitution'.

On the next day Moscow resumed its normal life. I watched old men busily sweeping Gorky Street, people on their way to work, crates being unloaded in our yard, boys bent on mischief. Everything was as usual, and I said to myself: it's like it was a week ago. That was the incredible thing: Stalin had died but life went on.

In the afternoon I went to the Red Square. There were mounds of wreaths; people stood about trying to read the inscriptions on the ribbons, then silently went their way.

Fadeyev and I met at the Sovietsky Hotel to see friends from the World Peace Council who had come for the funeral. Farge looked sad but he immediately started to cheer us up by saying: 'Everything'll sort itself out', for it was in his character to try to comfort others. Nenni embraced me and asked anxiously: 'What's going to happen now? Isn't it terrible?' Tears stood in his eyes. I myself did not know how things would go but Farge's example was infectious, and I said: 'In a week's time we'll meet in Vienna. No need to despair, everything will work out somehow'.

I walked along Gorky Street. It was a cold evening. Suddenly I stopped. A simple thought had struck me: I did not know whether things would be worse or better, but they were going to be different.

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THE VIENNA peace congress had elected a committee which was to submit a proposal to the five Great Powers for the opening of negotiations on a peace pact. Among its members were Joliot-Curie, Farge, Nenni, Isabelle Blume, the Japanese Senator Goro Hani, the Brazilian General Edgard Buxbaum, Tikhonov and myself. We met on 16th March.

After conferring for two days we decided to send the text to the governments of all countries and also agreed on an appeal to the people of the world. We worked in a pavilion in the park which was used for various functions. During the breaks friends would lead me along a path to some secluded spot and ask: 'Well, how are things going in your country?' Everyone was very concerned about what would happen now that Stalin was no more. An icy wind was blowing down from the Alps but here and there snowdrops and purple crocuses were coming out. Ten days had passed; I had had time to think and had come to the conclusion that things would be no worse than before, and possibly rather better. I had left Moscow just before the Supreme Soviet was to meet, but at the embassy they gave me the text of Malenkov's short speech which I translated to my friends; there was nothing new in it, but I encouraged them to hope and, for once, proved right.

The Moscow plane was due to leave Prague on 20th May, so Farge and I had to be there on the 19th. The ambassador said he would let me have a car to take us as far as the frontier and that a military escort would accompany us in another: 'Farge will be receiving a Stalin prize, we can't allow him to travel without an escort'. I was told that at the frontier a Czech car would be waiting for us. We set out early in the morning. Farge was surprised to see the second car full of uniformed men. 'It can't be helped, you're a Stalin prize-winner now'. He laughed: 'But I'm not a dictator of Nicaragua or Honduras'.

The military car swept on ahead of us. I was worried because I did not recognize the landscape which ought to have been familiar. I told the driver to stop; it was clear that we had taken the wrong road. The

driver sounded his horn but the car in front did not stop. 'We'll get there somehow,' the driver said reassuringly. Of course we got there, but not to the frontier post where the Czech car was waiting for us. The Soviet comrades said they were in a hurry to get back to Vienna and drove off. We remained at the small frontier post with the Czech guards who kept sighing heavily. They said they did have a car but as Gottwald's funeral was taking place today their chief had gone in it to Prague. I begged them to try to raise a car for us. They telephoned to someone and went on sighing.

Two hours later a decrepit vehicle rattled up and took us laboriously as far as the town of Ceské Budějovice. After changing cars three times we at last reached Prague. In all the towns and villages soldiers and local inhabitants had mounted a guard of honour round lighted bonfires. In Prague we drove through the southern districts and then went on foot. We were taken to the National Museum. The Václavské Náměstí was crowded with people. It was all exactly as it had been in Moscow: the catafalque, the wreaths, Bulganin in uniform, Chou En-lai, salvoes fired. But the people stood in silence. There was no pushing, no weeping.

Six days later the peace prize was presented to Farge in the Kremlin. The ceremony had already acquired a certain formalized routine and the speeches were much as usual on these occasions. In a very short address I spoke of Farge's generous heart. He embraced me and whispered in my ear: 'Thank you from my Provence'. (He was born, studied and spent his youth in Provence, where he had a small house called 'La Tourette'.)

On the next day Yves and his wife Fargette came to see us in New Jerusalem. They had been to our house before but were now seeing it in winter for the first time. Farge relished the snow, the blue conifers and the *pelmeni*¹ with vinegar. He was happy and gay. Catching sight of Lyuba's paints and brushes he asked for a canvas and began to paint a picture. On the next day the Farges were to fly to Tbilisi. I told them about the ancient architecture of Georgia, Pirosmanshili's paintings and the Georgian wines. Farge was delighted by the prospect: 'We'll have a good rest; the year's not been easy'.

This was on Friday, and on Monday I received a telephone call from Moscow: 'We're sending a car for you. Farge has had a grave

¹ Siberian meat dumplings.

accident'. As I entered Grigorian's office I saw Fadeyev; he usually sat very upright but now he was slumped in his chair. Grigorian said: 'You'll have to write the obituary'. The telephone rang, he picked up the receiver: 'Still alive? Good . . . I see . . .' He turned to us once more: 'Yes, write the obituary'. I protested: 'While the man's still alive?' Fadeyev took me into the next room and told me that Farge had gone to Gori where there had been a magnificent dinner with a great many toasts, and on the way back to Tbilisi the car had crashed into a stationary lorry. Farge, who had been sitting next to the driver, had a fractured skull. The others were unhurt, though Farge's wife was slightly cut about the face by glass splinters. 'You'll have to write it, Ehrenburg; I know how you feel, but what can we do?' I did not answer; I was thinking about Farge. Fadeyev also fell silent. It must have been two hours later that someone came into the room and said in a low voice: 'He's dead'.

I remember the terrible morning at the airport. It was cold. Day was just breaking. In the grey uneven light I saw the coffin, the wreaths and Fargette's eyes. Speeches were made by Laurent Casanova, Skobeltsyn and Tikhonov. When my turn came I barely managed to get out a few sentences; tears were choking me.

Farge was only fifty-two when he died, but that is not what I have in mind. Nor is it that with his loss our movement seemed all at once more flat.

Again, it is hard to reconcile oneself to the death of a friend. But even this is not what I have in mind. Our friendship was brief. I had met Farge first in the early spring of 1936 in Grenoble. The La Mure miners said: 'Farge will write about us in the press'. Students kept talking about Farge the writer . . . Farge the painter . . . The comrade who had taken me to La Mure said: 'You must meet Farge, there aren't many like him'. Our meeting was not a success; he seemed to concentrate on lighting his pipe, which would not draw, and he asked a lot of questions while I was in a hurry to catch the train. We did not meet again until the summer of 1946. He spoke with disgust of venality, destitution and speculation; he had been appointed Minister of Food and was raging with indignation: 'Men died in the Maquis, at the hands of the Gestapo, for a Black Market Republic to come into being and to make Gouin Prime Minister!' I realized that he was a man of great courage but we had only a short talk. Two years later we met again at the Wroclaw congress. I liked his speech; it was different

from the others. We conversed for a while, agreed with one another and then went our separate ways, each to his own life's problems. It was only in 1950, in Prague, where we were both engaged in preparations for the congress, that we spent several days together visiting museums, chatting about books and telling each other quite a number of things that people usually keep to themselves and sometimes carry with them to the grave; in short, we became friends. And then in the spring of 1953 Farge was stupidly killed. But that is not what I have in mind either.

What I have in mind is that in a world where I have met men of genius and men of no talent, striking personalities and colourless nonentities, Farge struck me as unique. Kipling wrote about *The Cat That Walked By Himself*. I have known quite a few people who tried to be just that – independent, original cats. But Farge, on the contrary, tried to be like everybody else. Before the war he had written a book on Giotto in which he said that the great fourteenth-century artist did not regard himself as a genius but only as a run-of-the-mill painter, nevertheless Giotto had expressed the thoughts and feelings of his contemporaries. Farge used to say that his home was any street in any country, in any town, in any village. He had innumerable friends. But still he was unique, the cat that really walked by himself. In 1950, when everywhere people were being regimented, when specialization had become the rule – a worker repeated the same movement day in day out, year after year – when the scientist knew nothing outside his narrow discipline, when any word could be taken by some as a canon and by others as a heresy, when even a confirmed eccentric was afraid of falling out of step, Yves Farge belonged to no party. Sometimes he criticized his friends and defended his opponents; he was on good terms with hundreds of people of varying social importance, even people hostile to one another; his life was governed by the interests and hopes of humanity as a whole, yet he was true to his own nature, doing what he thought right and ardently taking up causes he believed in. When serious people knew him only by hearsay they shrugged their shoulders, but after meeting and spending a few hours with him they would find themselves saying, almost to their surprise: 'There's a man for you!'

He tried his hand at a number of things. As a schoolboy he had had a passion for painting. He had twenty professions. In Morocco, where he was employed by a trading firm, he held exhibitions of his paintings. He was tried for organizing demonstrations against the execution of

Sacco and Vanzetti. He wrote articles against colonialism. Fargette told me that he had painted the portrait of a Berber who, by way of thanking the artist, shot an eagle, cut out its heart and insisted on Yves and Fargette eating it raw. Yves returned to France and wrote articles for Barbusse's journal, then he went to Grenoble where he had a job on a provincial newspaper; he wrote short stories and admired Litvinov's speeches; later he moved to Lyons where he worked for a Spanish Children's Welfare organization; he spoke at Socialist congresses (he was at that time in the Socialist Party), calling for opposition to fascism, and went on with his painting.

When the Germans occupied France he was among the first organizers of the Resistance. The Italians sought the 'terrorist Bonaventura' – Farge had shaved off his moustache, trimmed his shaggy eyebrows and assumed a false name. Fargette was arrested, he did what he could to save her, and at the same time organized the Maquis in the Vercors mountains, to which he sent men and arms. The Gestapo hunted him. He worked both with the Communists and the Gaullists, with Pierre Villon and Léo Hamon, with Bidault and with Rol. The National Front was formed and 'Grégoire', who had replaced Bonaventura, travelled between the southern zone and Paris, before returning to Lyons. In the early spring of 1944 Debré brought Farge the decree appointing him *Commissaire régional de la République* for the Rhône-Alpes region. He retained this office after the liberation of Lyons and the first proclamation to the citizens is signed by the Commissioner: 'Yves Farge (Grégoire)'.

Farge said that de Gaulle had flown in to liberated Lyons: 'I told him he would be dining with members of the Resistance. He interrupted me: "Where are the city authorities?" I said: "In prison". He didn't seem to like it'. After a short silence Farge added: 'And I didn't like *his* tone'.

A year later Farge asked to be relieved of his functions as Commissioner: the war was over and administrative work did not appeal to him. Bidault sent him to Bikini to represent France at the second atom bomb tests. Farge went and was appalled. A cable from Paris reached him in America: he was offered the post of Minister of Food. France was ruined and hungry. Farge declared war on the Black Market. At a session of the National Assembly the deputies were startled to hear Yves Farge, the Minister of Food, accuse Vice-Premier Gouin of protecting the big speculators. Farge did not remain long in office.

He wrote a book entitled *Le Pain de la Corruption*. Gouin sued him for libel. At about the same time a Paris theatre produced a play Farge had written. He continued to paint landscapes and organized *Les Combattants de la Liberté*, a forerunner of the peace movement. He travelled to Greece with Eluard. He wrote short stories. He spoke at meetings in defence of peace. In his book *Le Sang de la Corruption* he denounced the instigators of the war in Indo-China. He went to Korea with Claude Roy. He had met Joliot-Curie as far back as 1936 in Grenoble and they understood each other well. Farge became one of the leading spirits of the World Peace Council.

It is an unusual *curriculum vitae*, or if you like, record of work. Yet even that is not the main thing about him, nor is it the utter selflessness which distinguished Farge who cared nothing for place, fame or material rewards. The real point is that this cat that walked by himself had his own ideas about what was worth doing and what was not. Unlike so many people whom I have come across in my life Farge did not recognize any precedence in misery. During the Resistance years he risked his life rescuing a stranger on the road, an old peasant woman abandoned in a bombed village, Jewish children and, when told he ought to be more cautious because important tasks had been entrusted to him, he replied: 'But these things are important to me'. After the liberation he saved the lives of many of the lesser Vichy people, although he knew that by so doing he was inviting the hostility of certain comrades. He said: 'The government covers up for the great scoundrels, it's trying to take it out on the small fry'. When talking about this he cited a particular incident: 'They were dragging along a girl who was said to have slept with a German soldier. They'd shaved her head and were going to pull her clothes off. I arrived in the nick of time. Afterwards I was reproved: "You were right, of course, but it was only a trifling matter, and, after all, you are a Commissioner of the Republic". They've got it all nicely graded. Now if I'd taken it into my head to defend Pétain it would have been regarded as more in keeping with my position'.

I acted as interpreter during a most unpleasant conversation between Farge and Fadeyev: Yves was disgusted because at a bureau meeting a secretary of the Peace Council, the Reverend John Darr, had been publicly insulted. (I have mentioned that this American, a Congregationalist minister, had been suspected of spying and that the rumour had spread from China and reached Stalin.) Farge said: 'I shall resign

from the movement. If you have facts, publish them. But one can't talk about the defence of humanitarianism and at the same time insult a man who doesn't know the reason why'. Afterwards I said to Farge: 'You were wrong to attack Fadeyev—' He did not let me finish: 'Do you think I don't know it? I support Stalin's peace proposals, I agree with him. I object to anti-Soviet articles about your internal policy — I don't know what's going on in your country though I do know the authors of the articles and that they're corrupt. But Darr's case is different; I know him and until they can prove to me that he's guilty I shall defend him'.

Yes, he was a very special cat indeed.

He had one other trait which always delighted me. In Prague we often spent our evenings together, and on one of these occasions he started telling me about Raspail. Although I spent my early youth in the boulevard Raspail I had never known exactly who he was: Herzen mentions him as one of the revolutionaries of 1848 but someone had told me he was a distinguished chemist. Farge adored Provence and knew the life stories of many Provençal men. He told me that Raspail had been born in the town of Carpentras. He was eighteen when he was condemned to death — those were the days of the White Terror. He managed to escape. He worked as a scientist without either laboratory or apparatus; he discovered the function of sugar in the body tissues forty years before Claude Bernard, and the importance of bacteria long before Pasteur, but no one was interested in his discoveries: he was looked upon as a crank. In 1830 he fought on the barricades in defence of freedom. The new King offered him a job. Raspail refused. Then the King ordered his arrest. While in prison he wrote a book on chemistry. In May 1848 he led the workers into the Chamber where the Constituent Assembly was in session. The workers demanded the right to work. Raspail was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. When he came out he was banished from France and went to Belgium. He returned on the eve of the Franco-Prussian war and the weavers of Lyons elected him to Parliament. In 1874, when he was eighty-one, he was sentenced to another two years' imprisonment for supporting the Paris Commune. He died at the age of eighty-five. Farge told me his story with great animation; he must have felt a spiritual kinship with this lifelong rebel, the Utopian Socialist, the scientist whose discoveries left no trace. Farge commented: 'Provence breeds people of great spirit'.

Much later, after Farge's death, I found in Lamartine, who was a moderate Liberal and an opponent of Raspail, these words about him: 'He infected the people with his fanatical hope which was without any admixture of hatred'. This is what made me remember Farge's talk about Raspail at this juncture. Fanaticism was alien to Farge but in one respect – that is, in hope – one could call him fanatical. No matter how bitter the reality, Farge always hoped that right would prevail and his hope infected others.

On 6th February 1934 the French fascists came out into the streets of Paris. On 9th February Farge organized a Committee of Vigilance in Grenoble. Two of his friends supported him. Three men. The committee called a demonstration. On 11th February thirty thousand Grenoble citizens demonstrated in defence of the Republic. In 1948 Farge invited former members of the Resistance to get together and form an organization in defence of peace and freedom. Very few people responded to the call. Farge said that as they had no money for a newspaper, or even for leaflets, each one of them would have to speak wherever he could, and he injected so much hope into his words that soon the small group was transformed into a powerful force: the French Partisans of Peace.

One knows that superstition, fear, mistrust and malice are infectious. In those years I was often depressed, discouraged and full of foreboding, and each time I met him Farge infected me with his hope. I have said that in Vienna I tried to instil hope in others. It may be that what helped me was not only my reflections but also Farge's close presence, his words, his smile. He was too generous-hearted, too decent-minded, too sanguine of spirit to believe that baseness and evil could triumph.

Even at political meetings his language was always his own and not jargon. This appealed to ordinary people and often annoyed professional politicians. I remember one day in Prague, during the summer of 1950, when we were discussing the draft of a short appeal in support of the Congress of the Peoples. Phrases that had appeared thousands of times in all the newspapers of the world were suggested. Farge took his pipe out of his mouth and dumbfounded everybody by saying: 'One should begin with the simplest words like: "Things cannot go on like this"'. There were some objections: 'We're appealing to adults, not children'. After lengthy discussion Farge's text was accepted, and the appeal, pasted up on the walls of towns everywhere, arrested the

attention of passers-by and gave them something to think about.

He was liked by the most widely differing people (even by his political opponents): the inhabitants of the small towns and villages in the region round Apt (it was not entirely unconnected with Farge that the ochre manufacturer Chauvin had become a supporter of the peace movement); by postmen, vine-growers, teachers, workers, shopkeepers; by Ministers past, present and future; by artists, provincial Demostheneses and young Raspails; by Fadeyev and the Abbé Boulrier; by Eluard and by Marseilles rogues. Yves held the key to all hearts.

It was not for nothing that he had nicknamed his wife 'Fargette'. They were married when she was in her teens. He imbued her with some of his energy, endowed her with his breadth of outlook and infected her with his hope. When the Nazis imprisoned her Yves wrote to her: 'I am convinced that we are strong because even when we are separated we give each other strength . . . In no circumstances must one despair, nothing is lost yet. And then, too, what remains and will remain for ever is our pride: we know that both of us are above fear'.

One can no more say that he loved art than that people love air. In Prague I went with him to the gallery; there in the store-rooms, or rather in a basement, they had stacked paintings by the French Impressionists and others, such as Cézanne and Picasso, together with many works by the Czech nineteenth-century painter Purkyne. We spent several hours in the basement. When we got back to the hotel Farge began to talk about painting. He loved the landscapes of the Impressionists and he also said: 'Cézanne reminded us about the importance of form'. Then, in a different tone, he added: 'It's a shame. I'm sure that if the workers were shown Bonnard's garden or Purkyne's family portrait they wouldn't allow them to be put back into the basement; I'm absolutely certain of it. You mark my words, those paintings will be back in their place quite soon'. In the same way, in Moscow, in front of a huge canvas depicting Stalin standing in a field, he said to me: 'I bet that in a year or two this'll be put away: it debases Stalin, the Russian field and art'.

After his death I was sent a packet of seeds from Paris with the words 'ordered by M. Yves Farge' on the envelope. I sowed them too late - in April - and, just before the autumn ground frosts, red mimulus, the stars of gaillardia, blue morning glory and nasturtiums, dark

as blood, burst into flower. They lasted a week and turned black after a frosty dawn. I saw them as I was writing the first pages of *The Thaw*. I also saw Farge's smile and heard his words: 'Everything'll sort itself out'.

I talk to him even now. In old age to console oneself is not enough, and for a man over seventy hope is no longer centred on his own success, it is hope of the kind that Farge expressed when he once said to me: 'In our own time or later, it doesn't greatly matter'.

I have paused to ask myself what Farge left behind. He never devoted enough time to painting or to literature, so his pictures are not likely to be hung in galleries nor his books to be republished; historians will make only glancing references to him: serious works do not seem to have space for cats that walk by themselves. In a matter of ten or twenty years, those with whom he worked and fought will be dead. Yet I believe that a man's posterity lies not in whether his names lives on but in the changes he has brought about. Farge kindled a spark in the hearts of millions. They may forget his name, but they have assimilated his teaching and passed it on to their children; in that way Farge probably did more to stimulate an awareness of reality, conscience and humane feeling than many an important politician, great scholar or famous artist.

However that may be, I should like my last word about Farge to be one of personal gratitude: through him I learnt to divest myself of many unworthy traits and to love and to live – and to hope.

ON 4TH APRIL I was woken by the telephone. Savich, his voice breaking with emotion, said: 'Have a look at *Pravda* – the statement on the doctors'. I cannot say how many times I read and re-read the brief announcement printed on the second page. I knew none of the doctors involved but I realized that something extraordinary had happened. The statement said that the doctors had been wrongfully accused, that they were completely innocent and that their confessions of guilt had been obtained 'by impermissible methods of inquiry, the use of which is strictly forbidden by Soviet law'. This was published in *Pravda*, it was broadcast, it was said openly for all the world to hear.

Below the item about the doctors was an article on orchards. Then, still further down the page, a short notice caught my eye: the woman doctor who had so recently been awarded the Order of Lenin for helping to expose 'the murderers in white coats' had been deprived of the Order.

The day before we had invited S. E. Golovanivsky, who had arrived from Kiev, to our home in the country and had promised to pick him up at his hotel. He had not seen the paper yet. I told him the news; I think I knew the statement by heart. He would not believe either Lyuba or me. As we drove past a copy of the paper posted up in the street, Golovanivsky begged us to stop: 'I must read it myself'. He stood in front of it for a long time. Other people also stopped to read it. I got out of the car. An elderly man said in a loud voice: 'So that's the way it really was!' and smiled broadly.

Two days later, also in *Pravda*, there was a leader which said that the doctors' case had been investigated under the direction of Rumin who had now been arrested. *Pravda* referred to what had been worrying me for some time: 'Despicable adventurers of Rumin's type tried by means of a case they had themselves fabricated to foment in Soviet society, which is welded together in moral and political unity and the ideas of proletarian internationalism, feelings of national hostility, profoundly alien to Socialist ideology. With this provocative aim they did not shrink from using base calumny against Soviet people. A

thorough investigation has established, for instance, that an honest public servant, People's Artist of the USSR Mikhoëls, was slandered in this way'. The leader also said: 'Only men who had lost all sense of their Soviet identity and of human dignity could have gone to the lengths of arresting Soviet citizens illegally'. My first thought was: astounding — Beria showing up his own people! I realized that history was beginning to unravel the tangle in which the clean and the unclean had been intertwined, and that the matter would not end with Rumin. Only a month had passed since Stalin's death yet something in our world had already changed.

I want the young Soviet readers of these memoirs to understand that it is impossible to delete a quarter of a century of our history. Under Stalin our people transformed backward Russia into a powerful modern State, built Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk, dug canals, made roads and smashed Hitler's armies which had conquered the whole of Europe; this people had studied, read, matured spiritually and performed such feats that it may rightfully be considered the hero of the twentieth century. All this is well known to every Soviet citizen who worked and lived at that time. But no matter what joy we felt in our successes, no matter how much we admired the unbreakable, unshakeable spirit and talent of our people, no matter how highly we valued Stalin's intellect, we could not live at peace with our consciences and we tried in vain not to think about certain things. We knew that side by side with the great achievements of which the press informed us, unjust and foul deeds were being done of which people spoke in whispers, and then only among their closest friends. When I say 'we' I mean the circle in which I moved — writers, artists, some old Bolsheviks, certain army men — a hundred, or perhaps two hundred in all; but I believe that a great many other Soviet citizens felt the same. Almost everyone had a friend or a comrade, a colleague or a neighbour who had been arrested and had disappeared without trace, someone in whose guilt it was almost impossible to believe. People kept silent or whispered, and then, suddenly, they began to talk without glancing fearfully over their shoulders, without looking at the telephone as if it were a dangerous enemy; they began to talk simply, humanly, out of that good-heartedness and strict moral sense which have always characterized our people. It seemed a miracle, and more than once in those April days I thought of Lenin, of his generous mind and spiritual integrity.

But now I am seized with the urge to break off and describe the charm, the magic of April in our part of the country which does not enjoy the warmth of the south. Here and there the snow still lies in grey patches, but you can see that the festival of spring is about to start: tiny blades of grass and the tender stars of future dandelions are pushing their way up out of the earth, the pussy-willows are beginning to show and birds that have flown in from everywhere are chirping; all is noise, restlessness and gaiety after the long months of silence, after the cold that is like loneliness, after the trials of the winter. Perhaps I feel like this because in old age autumn and the winter that follows it are painful, reminding one too sharply of one's own withering, of things familiar to anyone past sixty. But spring is a world of youth, and there is nothing more heart-warming to an old man than to watch children breaking the ice on a puddle that has frozen overnight, to listen to their shouts, as tumultuous and pleasant as the twittering of the birds, to see, at evening, young lovers, who seem almost afraid of their happiness, holding hands, though the evenings are chilly and fingers get cold. All this happens precisely at the very start of April, in the days that mark the turning point, when one side of the street is cold and deserted, and icicles hang motionless, while on the other side all is sunshine, noise and spring. Our house stands on the northern slope of a low hill, and at the beginning of April we have mountains of snow; but still it yields, it settles, I scatter it, I break it up, and with my whole being I feel that life is triumphant. Even if for a moment you remember that everything is now in the past, that your springtimes are numbered, joy gets the upper hand; you want to laugh, do foolish things, dream about the future – not your own brief future, but the future of the world. This is how April in the Moscow countryside affects me.

And that April of which I am now writing was quite special. It warmed the old people, it played urchin pranks, it wept with the first rains and smiled when the sun came out again. It must have been this particular April that was in my mind when, in the autumn, I decided to write a short novel and straight away put down the title, *The Thaw*, on a sheet of paper. The word seems to have misled quite a few people; certain critics said or wrote that I must have a liking for mould and damp. Ushakov's dictionary gives this definition: 'The thaw is a warm spell in winter or at the approach of spring, causing snow and ice to melt'. I was thinking not about the thaws that occur in winter

but about the first April thaw, after which come slight frosts and gentle rain and bright sunshine: the thaw heralding the spring that is not far behind.

On 2nd May Korneichuk and I left for Stockholm for the meeting of the World Council bureau. In my pocket was a copy of *Pravda* of 1st May with my article *Nadezhda* (Hope), in which I had said: 'The hope of this spring is connected not only with the renewal of negotiations at Panmunjon . . . The Soviet Government has clearly stated that it is prepared to co-operate with the governments of other countries in order to ensure general peace . . . Everyone realizes that the days of monologues are past and that the time for a dialogue has come'. The bureau met six weeks before the World Council session. Everybody talked cheerfully about the future: the idea of negotiations, which only a short time ago had been regarded as utopian, was now referred to in the speeches of statesmen the world over.

I remember Liselotte Mehr telling me that I looked younger; this was probably because so much in life had started to change, and spring had warmed even me, a man looked upon as an irredeemable sceptic. We touched on many topics and I told Liselotte that the saying – which exists in many countries – that one swallow does not make a summer was downright stupid. Of course if a swallow were to appear too early it might have to endure cold and hunger, and even die; all the same, it would not come in autumn or in winter but at the start of a belated spring. Swallows do not make the seasons of the year but in autumn they leave us and in spring they return.

The meetings of the World Council began in Budapest in the middle of June. We were full of hope, but the events in Berlin and the execution of the Rosenbergs reminded us that history, far from rushing along a motorway, follows a devious course through winding footpaths. I do not intend to go into the German situation, which would mean turning from reminiscences to what is still a burning topic. But I must recall the Rosenbergs' execution. It struck everyone not only as a shameful act but as a political blunder as well. Two months previously Eisenhower had made a speech saying that an atomic war would be a universal catastrophe and that America wanted peace. The text of this speech was printed in *Pravda* together with the Soviet reply. It looked as if the McCarthy era of hysterical intolerance had come to an end. The trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg lasted a long time. They lived in prison-cells awaiting death, and wrote to each

other about many things, including their young children. These letters were published and I have just found this cutting from *Le Figaro* which usually fawned on America: 'Only people of generous and pure heart can speak like that'. Cardinals and the French President, Thomas Mann and Roger Martin du Gard, Herriot and Mauriac all appealed to Eisenhower to spare the Rosenbergs. The lives of two innocent people were cut off by an absurd political act, a concession to extremist opinion, an expression of anger at the European allies' desire to negotiate with the Soviet Union. Joliot said to me: 'It's horrible, but we mustn't lose heart. The advocates of a strong-arm policy may hold things up, they may do a lot more harm, but it's now clear that the idea of negotiations has seeped through to every layer of American society, even into the Southern States'.

(Joliot was right: a month later the war in Korea came to an end, and in the following year the State Treaty with Austria and the agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Indo-China were both signed.)

In New Jerusalem I resumed work on an article I had begun in the spring *On the Writer's Work*. It was a reply to a letter written to me by a young Leningrad engineer who said: 'While our Soviet society is incomparably ahead of tsarist Russia, the classical authors wrote better. Of course some modern books are interesting but there are a great many others which make you wonder why they were ever written. They appear to contain all the necessary ingredients yet there is something missing, they do not stir your emotions and the characters are not at all like people in real life'.

My article was an attempt to analyse the psychology of artistic creation (I later returned to the same problem in my essays on Stendhal and Chekhov). I wanted to explain the deep-seated causes impeding the development of our literature; I have referred to them more than once in these memoirs and shall not repeat them now. I want to quote only one short passage to show what my thoughts were in the summer of 1953: '... Why are so many novels and short stories published in our country depicting our contemporaries as spiritually impoverished? It seems to me that the fault lies partly with some – unfortunately numerous – critics, reviewers and editors who still think that to over-simplify a character enhances it and that the deepening and broadening of a theme means its debasement. For many years our journals published hardly any poems about love... It may be claimed that the epics of reconstruction excluded all other themes. Yet Maya-

kovsky wrote his poem *About This* in an equally heroic time . . . Why does one so seldom find stories with any mention of love, or family dissensions, or illness, or the death of dear ones, or even of bad weather? (The action usually takes place on "a fine summer day", or on "a fragrant May evening", or on "a clear, bracing autumn morning".) Some critics still cling to the naive view that our philosophic optimism and the portrayal of our people's achievements are incompatible with descriptions of unrequited love or the loss of someone dear'.

I spent almost all my time in the country. But in the early days of July we went to Moscow. Irina turned up and said: 'Have you heard?' and proceeded to tell us that she had seen a lot of troops in the street and that the day before she had heard at the film studio that Beria had been arrested. A week later it was in the papers. The announcement was sensational, though to tell the truth I was not altogether surprised. Months before, when the illegal actions of the security organs had first been made public, I had asked myself whether it was possible that things would stop at so relatively insignificant a figure as Rumin. Beria was still in the government and wielded great power. Now I did not meet a single person who had the smallest doubt of his guilt. Everybody was overjoyed. Millions of people still believed that Stalin had had no part in the crimes, but Beria was universally hated and was spoken of as a cruel and base creature corrupted by power.

A group of writers was invited to the Central Committee where a secretary explained to us the reasons for Beria's arrest. For the first time we, non-Party writers, were told things that had not appeared in the press – and this, too, seemed to me a good omen. The comrade who addressed us said: 'Unfortunately, during the last years of his life Comrade Stalin was greatly influenced by Beria'. Thinking over these words I recalled the year 1937. Would anyone say that at that time Yezhov had exercised an influence over Stalin? It is clear that such unimportant people could not affect Stalin's course of action in State affairs. I re-read the *Pravda* leader on Beria's arrest: "Out of dislike for any kind of personality worship," wrote Marx, "I, during the existence of the International, never allowed the publication of the numerous addresses recognizing my services with which I was mol-ested from different countries. I never replied to them, except only for an occasional rebuke. The first time Engels and I joined a secret society of communists, it was only on condition that everything making for

superstitious worshipping of authorities would be deleted from the statutes" '.

It was clear that the 'personality worship' and the 'superstitious worshipping of authorities' referred not to Beria but to Stalin. Of course I could not foresee the 20th Party Congress, yet I recognized that here was something more than the elimination of a criminal, an executioner: it was the first move in the repudiation of the methods, the habits and the arbitrariness of the Stalin years.

I was aware that human relationships were undergoing a change, that people were beginning to talk freely to one another. The 'normalization of the working day' was a measure of no direct political character, but it gave back to millions of people human conditions of existence. We all knew that Stalin rose late and went to bed late and liked to work at night. Any man is entitled to his own personal habits and idiosyncrasies. Stalin, however, was not a man but a god, and the least of his quirks was reflected in the life of innumerable people. Ministers were afraid to leave their offices before two or three in the morning: Stalin might call them on the intercom. The Ministers in their turn detained the heads of departments, who detained their secretaries, who detained the typists. Many husbands saw their wives only on Sundays: they left for the office at midday and came back at two or three in the morning. When the man was at home his wife was either out at work or asleep. The notions of 'day' and 'night' had lost all meaning; and now, in the late summer, there was an end to all this.

In September a Plenary Session of the Central Committee was held. In Stalin's time what we heard and read was always the same: everything was going smoothly, all problems had been or would soon be solved. In Engels I saw a beggarly market where foodstuffs from Moscow were sold at prices quite beyond the reach of even the average office worker, yet we were constantly told of the general well-being. And now at the Plenary Session agricultural policy was subjected to sharp criticism and the state of stock breeding was exposed as deplorable: the number of cows in the Soviet Union was shown to be below that of 1916 in tsarist Russia. I had known even before this that there was a shortage of milk in the country; what was new was the fact that you could read about it in the papers. What people called 'showing off' had been dealt a blow, to the satisfaction of the general public.

I got down to work on *The Thaw*. I wanted to depict how historical

events of tremendous importance affect the lives of people in a small town and to impart my feeling about the thaw and my hopes. Much has been written about this short novel. It was a time of transition, and there were those who found it difficult to renounce the recent past; they were infuriated by the mention of the doctors' case, by the cautious references to the thirties and, most of all, by the title of the book. In the press *The Thaw* was unanimously attacked and at the second Conference of Writers at the end of 1954 it was cited as an example of how present-day life should *not* be depicted. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* quoted letters from readers criticizing the novel. However, I personally received many thousands of letters standing up for it.

I have recently re-read it. (I mean the first part, written at the end of 1953. In 1955 I made another blunder by writing a second part, colourless and, what is more important, artistically unnecessary, which I have now excluded from my collected works.) I still think the book succeeded in conveying the spiritual climate of that memorable year. What is unusual is that the subject and the characters are made to serve as illustrations to a lyrical theme. Some of the characters I like: the elderly engineer Sokolovsky, the provincial bureaucrat Zhuravlev, the honest painter Saburov, the pot-boiler Volodya. There are few references to the events of 1953. Zhuravlev says to his wife about Vera Sherer: 'I've nothing against her, she's a good doctor. Still, there's no question, one oughtn't to trust her too far'. Some time after the papers announce the rehabilitation of the doctors, Zhuravlev says, yawning, to his wife: 'It turns out that they weren't guilty after all. So your Sherer needn't have upset herself'. The engineer Koroteyev reproaches himself with duplicity: 'I often say: that's all right in books but not in life . . . Yet I don't mean to be dishonest. Why does it happen like that? . . . Savchenko is a much more integrated person, he hasn't lived through the thirties or the war, his demands are higher, that's his right. It looks as though we're getting nearer to what we once only vaguely dreamt of'. There are many conversations about art. I gave Saburov Falk's devotion to art, his self-sacrificing life and even some of his thoughts. I read this chapter to Falk before sending my manuscript to the journal and he approved of it. Whether *The Thaw* is a good novel or not, it was at least written with sympathy for the characters and with the wish to show what makes some of them behave badly. The pot-boiler Volodya is sensitive to art; when he sees Saburov's work he realizes what he has forfeited for the sake of money and

applause. It chills him, and this may be a pledge of his redemption. Two elderly people who have suffered many wrongs, who are lonely and slowly freezing, find each other, and Sokolovsky, looking from his window at the early spring day says smiling: 'It's funny, Vera will come any minute now and I don't even know what I'm going to say to her. I won't say anything. Or I'll say: "Vera, the thaw has set in"'. I am glad I wrote this short novel, although it has cost me many bitter moments.

Five years ago, when I embarked on my memoirs, I decided to end them with the day when I started writing *The Thaw*. Now that I have reached that point, I am more than ever convinced that it was the right decision: I have found it harder to write of the months out of which *The Thaw* emerged and of its subsequent fate than of many a far more dramatic event in the years before. 1953 marks the opening of a new chapter, not only in my own life but in that of our people. Though years rich in happenings have followed, they are still so close to us in time, so actual, that they hardly belong to my reminiscences. (Although I have referred to some of these events and to some people who are still living, or who have died since 1953.)

This work has taken me five years, in which time I have known many happy spells as well as some painful ones. Rather to my surprise, I have experienced both happiness and grief more acutely than in my youth, though I feel my strength has been ebbing, and even if feeling is undiminished it is yet an old man's blood flowing in the hardened arteries. At this point I might well write 'The End', but before I do so I should like to take one more backward look in an attempt to make sense of the long life of an ordinary man in extraordinary times and, if not to sum up, at least to draw certain partial conclusions and communicate my doubts and my hopes.

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A YEAR ago a comrade working on archives sent me a copy of a tsarist Security Police document: 'Extract from an unsigned letter obtained through an agent, sent from Moscow on 17th November 1908 to Sergey Nikolayevich Shestakov in Kiev: "... From Poltava I travelled by way of Smolensk to Moscow. Outwardly things are pretty bad here: I have to put up for the night in odd places; in spite of many acquaintances it is hard to find a night's lodging. The impression I gathered in general about Moscow and from our friends in particular is that, however depressing things are, they are relatively satisfactory compared with the south. I would not say that the situation is any better than it was in the spring, but at least it is no worse. Many people are convinced that the Party crisis is coming to an end. At the recent regional conference a certain re-animation of the work was noted, especially in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Sormovo and in the Moscow district. As you know from the press, the Moscow district committee was arrested the other day. With regard to tactical points I must tell you first of all about the Moscow committee's resolution which was passed with certain amendments by the regional conference. Its main propositions are: a general international sharpening of class contradictions, the end of a certain revival in Russian capitalism, the mongrel social-reformist trend among the bourgeoisie, the abomination of the government's agrarian "reform", the impossibility of a successful economic struggle – and the way out to be political ferment, the inevitability of a revolutionary upsurge with a more proletarian and international character. In the way of practical tasks the Party notes the necessity to establish closer relations with the proletariat in the West, to form a strong underground organization, the desirability of a stricter Socialist approach to the work and also the need for sterner methods of influencing the parliamentary group. This last has begun to behave better: it has passed a resolution accepting the leadership of the Central Committee, and the deputy Belousov even made a speech on the agrarian question the text of which was written by Lenin. It has also come out officially with a statement on its disagreement with

the deviating Bolsheviks. These have gained the support of Plekhanov, Martov and Dan, who have declared that illegal work now is not only inexpedient but positively harmful. The editorial board of the *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata* (The Voice of the Social-Democrat), that is, the Caucasian Mensheviks headed by Kostrov, do not accept this. Number 8-9 of the *Golos S.D.* is not to be found in Moscow, but No. 30 of *Proletariy* (The Proletarian) has been received””.

As I read this letter I did not immediately recognize its author and thought he must have been some old Bolshevik, a comrade of mine in bygone days. But when I got to the address it suddenly came back to me. At the end of the letter a note had been added: ‘In the opinion of the Police Department the writer of this letter is Ilya Ehrenburg who is under police surveillance’. The Police Department was not mistaken; it is indeed a copy of a letter I wrote to Valya Neumark. Re-reading it I was less surprised by its contents than by its language, in rather the same way as one finds it difficult to recognize oneself on an old photograph.

When I wrote those words about the misdeeds of the Duma faction I was not yet eighteen. A year later I wrote the following verses: ‘I have taken leave of your loud bold songs, of the banners rebelliously raised to heaven, because the camp was too narrow for me’.

Some of my readers have been baffled by the sudden and swift transformation of an adolescent, fanatically engrossed in illegal political work, into a youth writing decadent verse. On arriving in Paris I was tremendously attracted to art and discovered a whole new world. However, I continued to attend meetings and the reading of political reports and hoped to make my way back to Russia to resume underground work. I made it clear that in these memoirs I should leave out certain things, but, as I have said, my short stay in Vienna played an important part in my giving up political work. While there I lived at X’s (I omit the name). It is possible that the impressions of a raw youth may seem to be presented with hindsight. My job was a simple one: I pasted the Party paper into a cardboard cylinder round which I packed art reproductions and then posted it to Russia. X was kind to me and when he learnt that I wrote verse he talked to me several evenings about poetry and art. He did not so much express opinions open to debate as categorical assertions. Later, at the first Congress of Writers, I heard similar assertions. In 1934 I was forty-three and had had time to look round and to understand a few things. But in 1909

I was eighteen and quite unable to see ahead or comprehend the march of history. To X the poets I admired most were 'decadents', 'a product of political reaction'. He talked about art as something of secondary importance, a by-product, and I went back to Paris bewildered and depressed: I felt as if I had been robbed of everything. I told Liza that I did not know how to live through the next day.

A reader has sent me a few early poems of mine printed in various magazines. These poems (incredibly feeble) have enabled me to recapture the torments of those far-off years; I felt I had lost my way: 'Sad and humble, humble in the dust, autumn roads, whither have you led me?' I scoffed at my own verses: 'Enough! I know both haughty posturing and cardboard breastplates. Down to earth, down to earth! Fight the enemies! I am once again a warrior begrimed with dust. Take me under your red banner! I am worthy of the armour of old'.

The letter written so long ago gave me pause. Valya Neumark, the Social-Democratic deputies to the Duma, and X who shattered me with his dogmatic pronouncements on the utilitarian essence of art, have been dead these many years. My life lies behind me and I can only say that there is a thread connecting the letter of the adolescent with the old writer's memoirs. I do not regret having started to work in the underground Bolshevik organization at the age of fifteen, nor that three years later, having in the meantime become infatuated with poetry, I stopped going to meetings; for a few months longer I attended the *Haute Ecole des Etudes sociales* but finally I dropped this too, read the old and the new poets from morning till night, gazed at pictures and listened to discussions about Cubism and 'scientific poetry'.

Nevertheless, even in those years I could not forget what at fifteen had seemed to me the simple and unique truth; I listened with emotion to people coming from Russia, I made a pilgrimage in May to the *Mur des Fédérés*, I hated the flash and falsehood of the world of money. Anyone who has read these memoirs thus far will know that all my life I tried, for my own satisfaction, to link justice with beauty and the new social order with art. The two Ehrenburgs in me seldom lived at peace with one another; often the one would subjugate and even trample on the other; there was no duplicity here but the uneasy fate of a man who made a great many mistakes and yet passionately abhorred the idea of treachery.

Critics seldom try to understand a writer, they have other things to do; occasionally (for the most part on special anniversaries) they extol

but more often they decry him. Western journalists have accused and still accuse me of tendentiousness, of political bias, of subjecting truth to narrow ideology and even to directives from higher up. Some Soviet journalists on the other hand have contended, and still contend, that I suffer from excessive subjectivity, but equally from objectivity, that I am unable to separate the new awareness of reality from the rubbish of obsolete emotions, that I portray unrepresentative characters and am an advocate of formalism. I have no intention of defending my books about several of which I have myself expressed fairly harsh opinions in these memoirs; my present subject is not my literary shortcomings but my past. *Men, Years – Life* is not a novel and I could neither change the plot nor alter the main character's traits. If I have said nothing about certain events in my life, I have at least been frank about my errors and irresponsibility. In extenuation I may say that inner inconsistencies and contradictions of this kind have equally affected many of my contemporaries; they would appear to be inseparable from our particular epoch.

My character was formed by the traditions, the ideas and the moral values of the nineteenth century. Today it all seems like ancient history, but in 1909, when I filled exercise-books with wretched verse, Tolstoy, Korolenko, Anatole France, Strindberg, Mark Twain, Jack London, Bloy, Brandes, Synge, Jaurès, Kropotkin, Bebel, Lafargue, Péguy, Verhaeren, Rodin, Degas, Mechnikov and Koch were still alive. I do not repudiate either the boy with his prickly hair-cut, who condemned the 'deviators' and scoffed at Nadya Lvova's enthusiasm for poetry, nor the raw youth who, after discovering Blok, Tyutchev and Baudelaire, was outraged by talk of the minor and essentially subsidiary role of art; today I understand them both.

My eagerness for revolutionary struggle and my work in the illegal Bolshevik organization were not wasted, they predetermined much of my life and, if they prevented me from getting a secondary education – for instead of going to school I spent my days at secret assignments, at meetings, in workers' hostels and cafés, and later in a prison cell – they taught me a great deal. Of course what pitched me into starting life in this particular way were the events of 1905, my older comrades, especially my friend Nikolay, a pupil at the gymnasium, and books, but more than anything it was my own character that prompted this decision.

In 1917 I did not at first recognize that this was what I had been

fighting for ten years earlier: in exile I had lost touch with Russian life and had developed an enthusiasm for other values, real or illusory, which, it seemed to me, were being trodden underfoot. Two years later I realized my mistake. Certain friends wanted me to join them in Paris but I went to Moscow instead. Of my own free will I attached myself to the idea which at first I saw as Gogol's winged troika and later as a State chariot, a tank, a sputnik. In 1957 I wrote: 'In deep autumn, from the dense Russian forest, in the cold and sadness of the countryside, it was sent up into the skies by the hope and despair of man . . . I do not know whether they will realize, whether they will understand . . . For forty years it has been storming above me, the sputnik of my hopes and of my anxiety, incredible, remote and yet my own'.

I put many of my doubts into the mouth, or rather into the diary, of one of the characters in *The Second Day*. Volodya Safanov hangs himself, and that was I trying to hang myself. I made myself keep silent about many things in the years of the swastika, of the Spanish war, of the life-and-death struggle. The epoch which is now referred to as 'the personality cult' added a forced silence to the voluntary one.

I might have been arrested, as so many of my friends were, during the years of arbitrary rule. I do not know what Babel's thoughts were when he died; he was one of those whose silence was not just a matter of caution but one of loyalty. I might have died in the post-war years, before the 20th Congress, like Tairov, Suritz and Tuwim. They, too, suffered anguish over the crimes committed, allegedly in defence of ideas which they shared and for which they felt themselves responsible. I am lucky to have lived to see the day when I was summoned to the Writers' Club and given Khrushchev's report on the cult of the individual to read.

It is far easier to change policy and the economic system than to alter human consciousness. I often come across people who have been unable to divest themselves of a sense of constriction, of fear, of casuistry, of survivals from the past. But a generation is now growing up which has not known 'stormy applause becoming an ovation', or nights of listening for a step on the staircase. The period of transition from religious beliefs to a scientific awareness of reality was very protracted; but the young people born in the early forties advanced in a single day from blind faith to critical thinking. One can only express gratitude yet again to those who were courageous enough to

see that the exposure of arbitrariness meant strengthening the ideas of the October Revolution. And my greatest joy is to listen to the opinions, sometimes immature but always sincere and outspoken, of our young people on the threshold of life.

With the years I have come to realize that both my love for art and my loyalty to the idea of Socialism are an inseparable part of one overriding interest: the fate of culture. When I began life culture was the creation and possession of the few. Now in our country, in some form or other and to a greater or less degree, culture has reached almost everyone. For close on fifty years people have been reading and thinking, and they have grown spiritually. During the years that *Novy Mir* has been publishing these memoirs I have received a great many letters; my contemporaries recall the past and speak of their anxieties and hopes, while the young people ask questions about those eternal problems of the meaning of life which in the old days used to be quite unjustly termed 'accursed'; all these letters have taught and inspired me.

I have frequently referred to my mistakes. Mistakes have been made by others, too, and by society as a whole – the list is long – a fact not forgotten by our opponents nor yet by our own people.

During the post-war years I have often visited the West. The standard of life has risen compared with pre-war days, the new industrial style in architecture and household goods has become paramount, life has grown more comfortable and also more restless. Peace of mind has disappeared not only as a result of the increase in mechanization but also because of the uncertainty of the morrow. I have witnessed the collapse of the Fourth Republic and the dismantling of the British Empire. It is only in the USA that one still hears apologies of capitalism, while the statesmen of Western Europe, with their talk of planned economy, sectors of nationalization and higher income-tax, try to make others believe that just by standing still they are keeping in step with the times.

I think that many of our mistakes, material and spiritual, arise from the fact that early morning is not high noon and that, as the French say: *si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*. It is easy enough to dash along the well-known roads of the past in a smooth-running, completely up-to-date car. But to find your road into the future is another matter; you often go astray and there is no one to ask the right way to your destination.

The world has altered greatly. When I entered conscious life despots and reactionaries were said to lack logic; Cartesianism was still alive. Half a century of history and the experience of each one of us have proved that the old logic is indeed bankrupt; impeccable hypotheses have been confuted by events; life has developed not in accordance with Descartes's laws but often in violation of them. There is no difficulty in explaining the past with the help of dialectics. But what worries me is how does a man conduct his personal life when he is confronted with situations unforeseen both by his favourite authors and at the many conferences and discussions he has attended?

When I was a boy, Russian, German and Italian schoolchildren were taught that it was sinful to kill, to steal, to fail to honour one's parents, to envy other people's happiness; they knew the Ten Commandments by heart. In French schools, after the disestablishment of the Church, a new subject, ethics, was introduced: the Ten Commandments were given a new look with the help of La Fontaine's fables, and the articles of the criminal code were embellished by quotations from Victor Hugo. The building of a house does not begin with the roof, and later generations will refer to the confused twentieth century as an epoch of great scientific, social and technical discoveries, but not as a time of the harmonious development of man. In our days the acquiring of knowledge is in advance of moral education the world over, physics is leaving art behind and people are approaching an era of nuclear-propulsion unequipped with the brakes of genuine morals. Conscience is not a religious idea, and Chekhov, who was by no means a believer, had a most sensitive conscience (as had other representatives of Russian nineteenth-century literature). I believe that it is imperative to rehabilitate the idea of conscience. But that is perhaps to overstep the proper bounds of this chapter and of the entire book.

I remember one of our lecturers saying in 1932 that Einstein's discoveries meant the revival of idealism and even mysticism. The new science encountered many unexpected obstacles: birth pangs are never easy. In a matter of thirty years the scientists' achievements became so clear that the average man's awareness of reality was radically altered. Nineteenth-century science looks to us now like a snug little dwelling. Something of the same sort, though on a smaller scale, must have happened to people at the time of the late Renaissance when they realized that the Earth was not the centre of the universe. The idea of infinity presents itself to us in a new light now. What formerly

seemed absolutely real has become an abstraction, and yesterday's abstraction is becoming a reality.

When the development of physics and its role in the making of nuclear weapons was finally grasped by politicians, military men and also by ordinary people, everyone realized the possibility of life on our planet being annihilated. There are two solutions open to us: either to stockpile nuclear weapons or to agree to general disarmament. I continue to travel about attending peace councils and conferences and 'Round Table' meetings. Sceptics sometimes remind me of the past – of The Hague Convention and of the Amsterdam Congress held before the Second World War – and tell me I am naive. But I think it is the sceptics who are naive. Formerly disarmament was the idealists' Utopia – or else the hypocrisy of robbers. When one tiger suggested to another that fangs should be drawn and claws clipped they hoped in this way to reassure the many millions of flocks of sheep. Today the tigers realize that nuclear war is not a question of strategic plans, not a question of who has most oil, steel or even uranium, but one of instant and general annihilation. Disarmament has become a vital necessity for us all, and if arguments about the way it is to be achieved still go on, it is only because tradition is far stronger in international politics than in science. There is only one question, namely, whether the warnings of the physicists will outstrip the routine of the diplomats so that governments realize the necessity of passing from talk to action before some stupid accident leads to catastrophe.

Life is full of contradictions. There are people who talk of co-operation in the conquest of outer space, about flights to the moon, and who at the same time (fortunately, in words only) are prepared to blow up this poor planet because they cannot reach agreement with others about the status of the sectors of one city. The age-old habit of settling disputes by force of arms today impels various States to equip themselves with atomic weapons. In my youth it used to be said that one cannot live beside a powder-barrel; today we live close to far more dangerous barrels. Scientific knowledge has outstripped wisdom.

In the second half of the twentieth century art has had to yield to other things everywhere. To all appearances it has gained ground: the output of novels has increased in almost every country, the number of people who go to picture galleries and exhibitions has grown, the cinema and television have become part of everyday life. Nevertheless, the role of art and letters in the personal life of very many people has

diminished. This may have come about because the voice of art has been drowned by the more resounding changes in science and in social life. Or it may be that these changes have led to a certain decline of interest in art: people have lost their peace of mind; they marvel at sputniks, fear nuclear bombs, are enchanted by new inventions, behave like lunatics at sports events and eagerly look forward to machines that will transform semi-fabricated foodstuffs into Lucullan feasts.

Certain notable inventions, like television, provide a daily substitute for art. People go less often to the theatre and instead of reading a book settle down in front of the television set. Fighting in the Congo and the Olympic games, the weddings of queens and the funeral of a president, ballerinas and performing cats, Hamlet and boxers, concerts and scandals in high society flit across the screen. All this flickers, clatters, thunders and mews; poetry mingles with advertisements, music with weather forecasts. People watch, and at the same time eat, gossip and quarrel, while the faculty for receiving impressions is blunted.

I remember that in my childhood people spoke of Tolstoy with reverence. They regarded him as a prophet. When Zola was condemned for defending Dreyfus the entire world was stirred. During the years of the First World War those who had not lost their heads listened to the voice of Romain Rolland. Paris audiences came to blows over Stravinsky's music and Picasso's décor. Today fighting may break out occasionally, but between fans at a football match.

It was entirely my own fault that some five years ago a discussion was launched in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on whether art was doomed in the 'atomic age'. One of the cybernetics experts jeered at the young people who felt passionately about art and, as he put it, were always gushing 'Ah, Blok! Ah, Bach!' I read thousands of letters on the subject, some addressed to me personally and others to the paper. Almost all the young people – girls and men – were horrified at the thought that art might be dying out; but the cybernetics expert found a hundred sympathizers who vaunted the grandeur of science as opposed to music and poetry; their arguments were a mixture of technocratic ideals and the utilitarianism of Turgenev's Bazarov.

If these people's prognostications were to be proved right then it would follow that the conquest of outer space would be undertaken by inferior beings with the necessary knowledge but devoid of either

culture or sensibility, and in fact differing little from the thinking-machines of the twenty-first century. The discovery of fire, that is, of how to make it, goes back to the Stone Age. Tens of thousands of years later Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound*. This tragedy lives on, and still today inspires millions of people, quickening man's feeling of personal dignity. Even flies have sexual impulses, but for love to be experienced thousands of years of art were needed – from the Minoans and Kālidāsa to Goethe, Stendhal, Tolstoy and on to Apollinaire, Blok, Mayakovsky, Hemingway, Eluard and Pasternak.

I believe that a new perception of reality, new modes of feeling, demand a new language of art. For people who knew only Giotto's painting and Rutebeuf's poetry, Villon, Rabelais and Paolo Uccello must have represented the decadence of art, while four hundred years later, for the French of the Second Empire, brought up on classicism and romanticism, Manet, Degas, Baudelaire and Flaubert appeared barbarians, trampling on beauty.

At the Leningrad meeting of the European Writers' Community, someone said that it was better to follow on the lines of Tolstoy, Dickens and Stendhal than on those of Proust, Kafka or Joyce. I do not believe that our times leave the artist no alternative but to choose whose imitator he prefers to be.

It is inevitable that I should have devoted so much space to art in these memoirs: it is a matter that touches closely not only my craft but also my perception of the world. I am convinced that one cannot go forward on one foot alone; I believe that without beauty to satisfy the spirit no social changes, no scientific discoveries will give mankind true happiness. The argument that in art both form and content are dictated by society, however true, seems to me too formal. Of course, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo knew more and felt more acutely and more deeply than their contemporaries, and of course they had to take into account the patrons, the cardinals, the princes, even the paid assassins of their time. But whether eulogized or persecuted, they were the philosophers, the discoverers who paved the way to the future. Their works still move us deeply today, whereas the history of Italian towns at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century strikes us as disorderly, bloody and altogether unattractive, though fortunately long over and done with. Was not Stendhal more perceptive, more profound than his contemporaries – the subjects of the 'good king with an umbrella'? During his lifetime *Le Rouge*

et le Noir was read by thousands of people of whom perhaps only a couple of hundred discerned its true value. Here was certainly no imitator. He grew out of his century, and outgrew it. His novels repelled many people, they angered even Balzac and Goethe who dimly sensed Stendhal's power. And could anyone claim that Pushkin's poetry, Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Times* and Gogol's *Dead Souls*, those works of genius, are mere reflections of the Russia of Nicolas I: no more than the concentrated products of the ideas and emotions of the progressive nobility of the epoch?

Wiener's book on cybernetics seemed to me enthralling but it did not make me sing a requiem for art. On the contrary, it made me realize how swiftly everything changes in our epoch. Literature and painting will change too. There is nothing worse than to indulge in the grousing of old age, critical of the times and of the younger generations, accusing them of not knowing how to aspire or suffer as their grandfathers did. Of that failing, at least, I am guiltless.

I am ending the story of my life at the onset of that period which must be my last and of which I do not care to write, namely, the present decade. Since the beginning of 1954, when I finished *The Thaw*, ten years have gone by. I have continued travelling all over the world, I have read books by new writers, I have met friends, I have loved, I have suffered and I have hoped.

In some ways I have lived more intensely and at times more vividly than when I was young. It seems that I had not yet plumbed the depths of certain emotions, nor heard the voice of quiet, nor appreciated to the full the glory of the last sunny days of late autumn.

Early in 1963 I spent two days with Picasso. I looked at his new series of pictures *The Rape of the Sabines*. It was David's painting that had given him the idea of the composition. According to the legend the Romans who wanted wives kidnapped the Sabine women, and when the Sabines came to make war on Rome, the women, who by that time had borne children, stopped the bloodshed. What Picasso created, however, was not a touching reconciliation but an apocalyptic vision of war, new *Guernicas*, in which every inch of the canvas is telling. I stood in the studio entranced and only during the night thought to myself: it's really extraordinary; after all, he's over eighty.

I went to many countries I had never seen before: India, Japan, Chile and Argentina; the world expanded for me: in my youth I had known only Europe and, by hearsay, the USA – one and a half

continents instead of five. I met many people who seemed to me important, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, with whom I had a conversation in Delhi and who struck me as being in politics what Amrita Sher-Gil's pictures are in art: a true amalgam of Indian national profundity and progressive western thought.

I went to Armenia and fell in love with the country; its pink-tinged aridity reminded me of Castile. I liked the people, who are passionately attached to their land, though by no means narrow or provincial but genuine citizens of the world. Saryan painted my portrait; he talked of the past and grew very heated about people who cared nothing for art; he might have been a novice painter in the first flush of excitement over ochre and cobalt instead of a very old man. In 1965 Saryan attained the age of eighty-five and his early paintings were put on exhibition: pictures of dogs in Constantinople, of Egyptian palm trees and Persian women. There was a film about him for which I wrote the script. I described how the artist's work had been hampered and how, in 1948, he had taken down his finest paintings from the walls and slashed them to pieces. I felt – remembering my own book *The Ninth Wave* – that I could well understand the painter's feelings.

I went on deriving great joy from art which continuously opened my eyes to fresh things. The invention of cinematography is a technical achievement, but after seeing Fellini's and Alain Resnais's latest films I realized that the cinema had found a language of its own; that it could present not only the acting of that superlative mime, Charlie Chaplin, visual reality and the dynamics of events, but also shed light on the airless, dark places of man's spiritual world in a different way from that shed by the theatre, the novel and painting.

I enjoyed the precision of Salinger's novel about an adolescent, and many books and stories by our own young writers, like Kazakov and Aksenov, gave me great pleasure. After reading the short and, on the face of it, conventional story by Solzhenitsyn, I felt enriched: not in Chekhov's manner but with Chekhov's depth the author had introduced into my world a wonderful Russian woman who had grappled with great difficulties.

In the last few years there have been many deaths among old friends: Falk, Nezval, Joliot, Rivera, Konchalovsky, Pasternak, Zabolotsky, Hemingway and Nazim Hikmet. I am very conscious of the thinning of the forest of my life. I look with almost superstitious solicitude at

those of my friends still living, and in the evenings I find solace in memories of the friends of my youth.

I have got to know Konstantin Paustovsky: in the old days I hardly ever met him; I always knew him as a talented writer and now I have found in him a noble-hearted, kind and courageous man. We have become friends in our old age. It makes me glad to think that Paustovsky is alive; that tomorrow he will say more; that he is my contemporary who has lived through many of the things I have described in these memoirs; that he is not only a great craftsman but a man of sensitive conscience; and that in the spring of 1963, at a difficult time, he came to me and comforted me.

I have also become much attached to Victor Nekrassov, a bold and intelligent writer. I have found that old age is not a blank wall: it, too, has its windows and a door.

I do not seem to have lost the capacity to love or hope, and it does not look as though I shall ever lose it now. Old age naturally restricts a man, his strength is gradually exhausted, but by way of compensation I now have not only more stored-up experience but a greater inner freedom.

Writing these memoirs has not been easy. No matter how much I may have written about the soarings of science or the struggle for peace, I was keenly aware that I was nevertheless making a personal confession in public. What has helped me was the knowledge that by writing about departed friends and about myself, by invoking names of people who have been dear to me, I was fighting off oblivion, the void, non-existence, which, according to Joliot, human nature abhors.

I knew when I started that this work would be criticized; that there would be those who would say I had kept silent about too many things, and those who would think I had said too much. In the foreword I wrote in 1963 to the second volume of these memoirs for its publication in book form in the Soviet Union, I said: 'This book, *Men, Years - Life*, has provoked many discussions and critical remarks. I should like to stress once again that the book is the story of my life, of the searchings, errors and discoveries of one man. It is therefore extremely subjective and I have never claimed to be writing a history of the epoch'.

It is not so much my book as my life that has been and will be criticized. But I cannot begin my life anew. I have admitted my many mistakes and instances of thoughtlessness too often to assume the role

of an aged mentor. I myself, for that matter, would gladly listen to the wise men capable of answering the questions that still harass me. I set out to tell the story of the years I have lived and the people I have known; yet, possibly, some of my readers may be helped by thinking over and understanding certain things about which I have written.

Today I have too many desires and not enough strength. I shall end with a confession: I hate indifference, curtained windows, harshness and the cruelty of isolation. While I was writing about friends who are no more, I sometimes stopped working, went up to the window and stood there as one stands at meetings in respectful silence for the dead; I did not look at the green leaves or at the snowdrifts, I saw only the face dear to me. Many passages in these memoirs have been dictated by love. I love life; I do not repent, I do not regret what I have lived through and what I have experienced; what I regret is that there is so much that I have not done, not written; that I have not grieved and not loved enough. But that is how life goes; the audience is already hurrying to the exits while on the stage the hero is still singing: "Tomorrow it will be I . . ."¹ And what *will* be tomorrow? Another play, a different set of characters.

1962-64. Revised 1965

¹ From *The Queen of Spades*.

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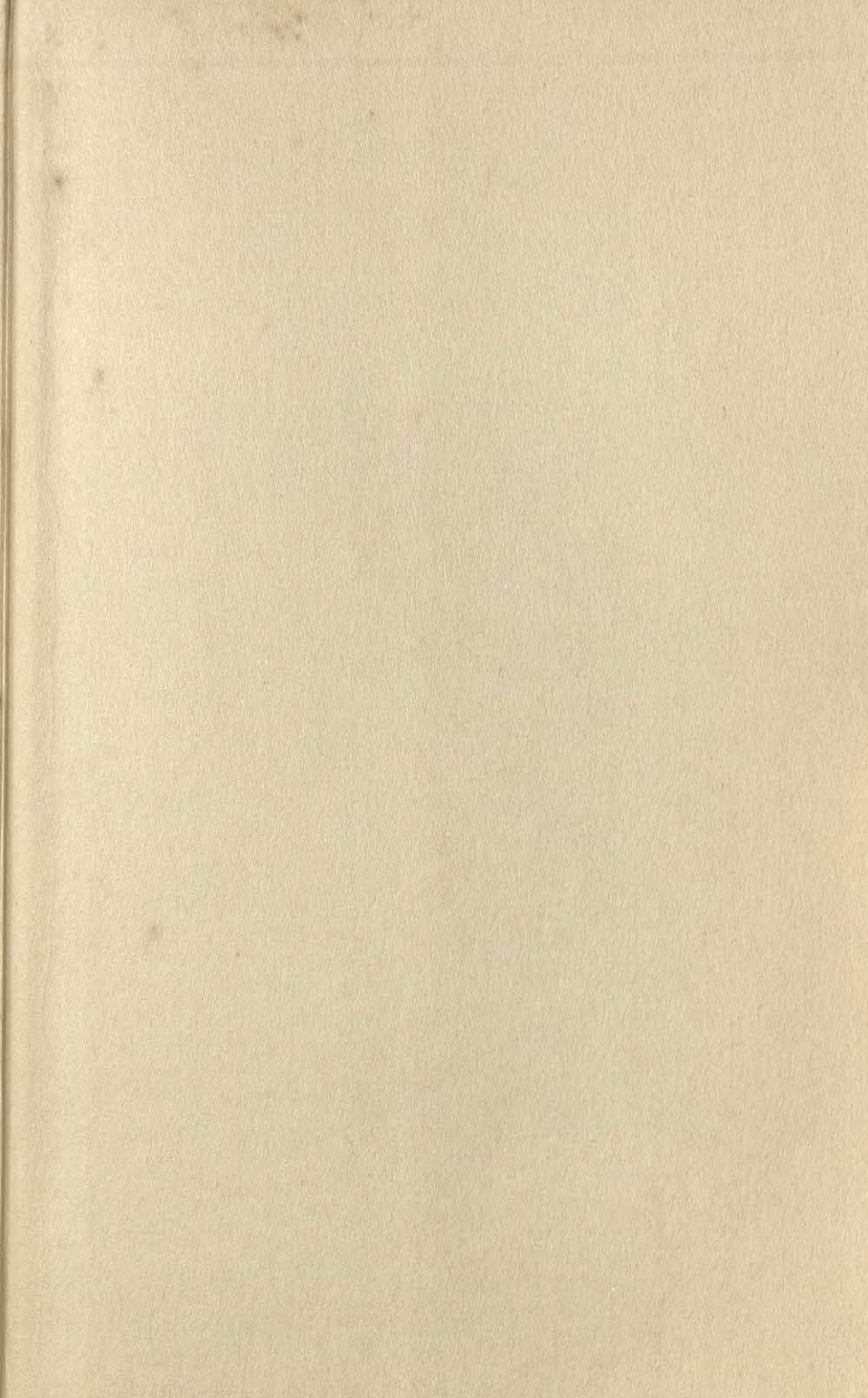
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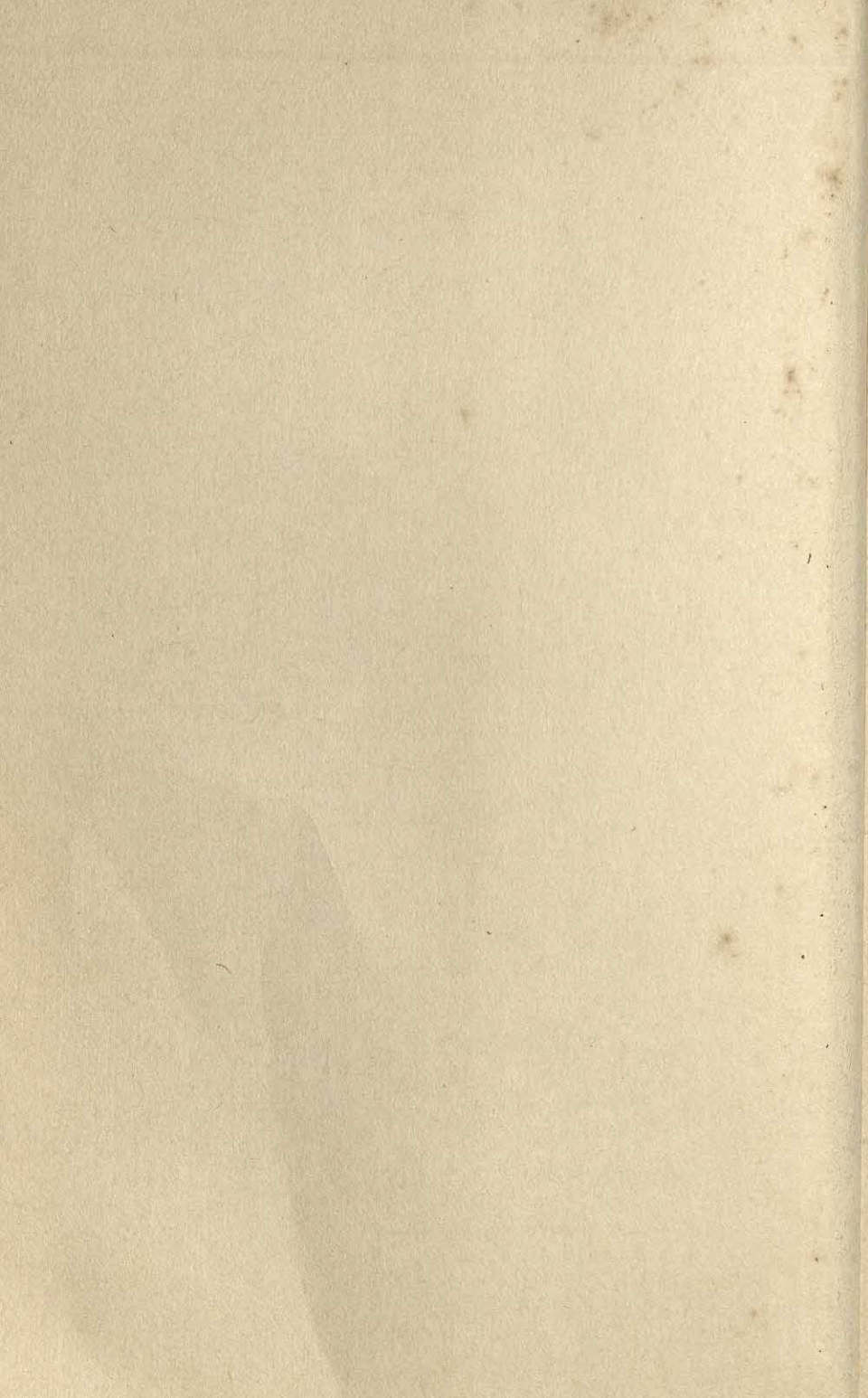
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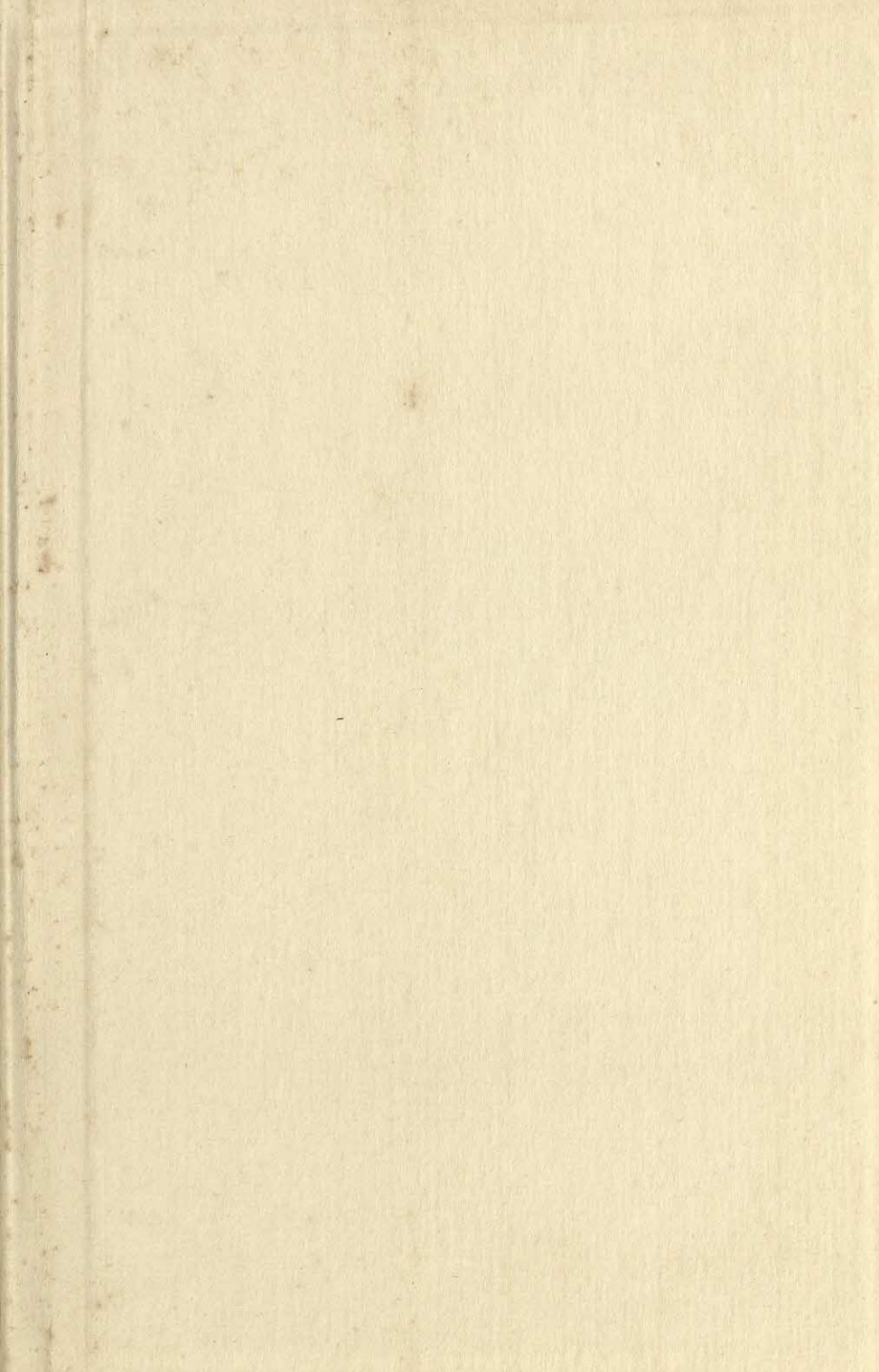
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